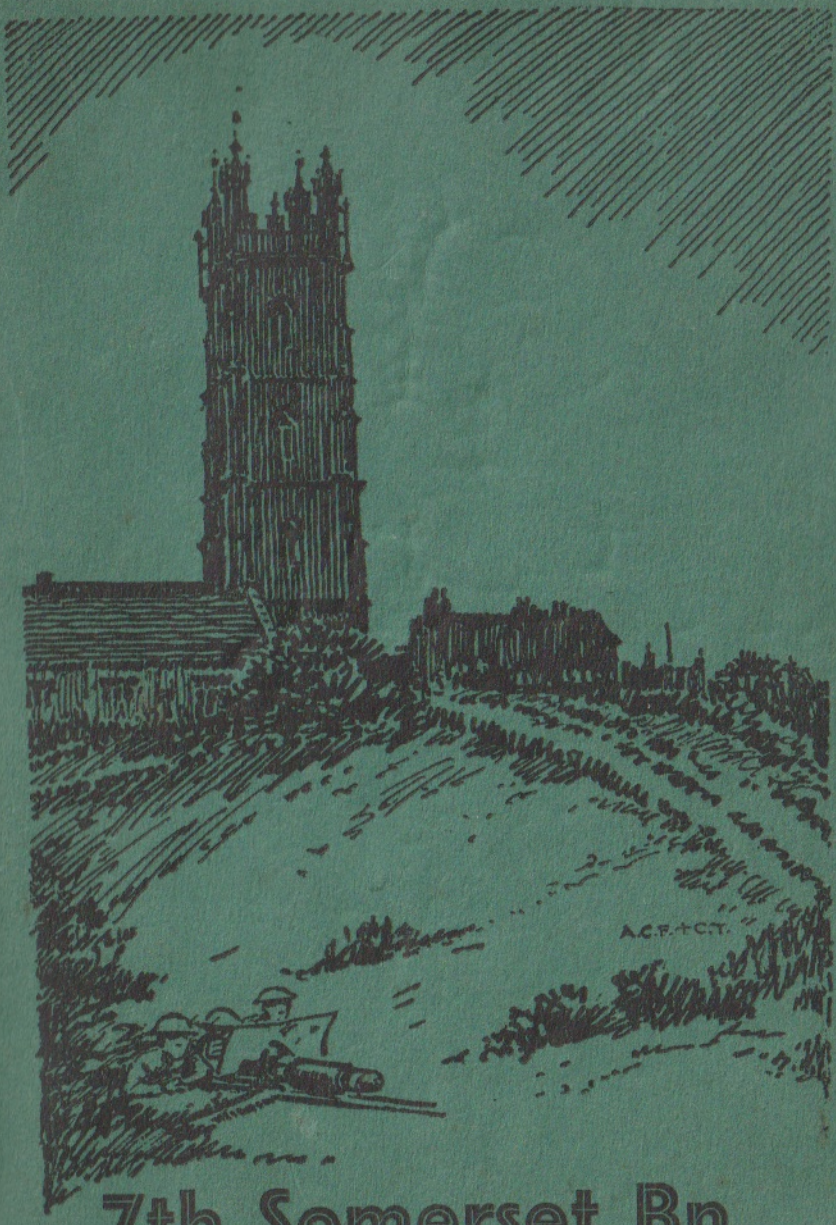
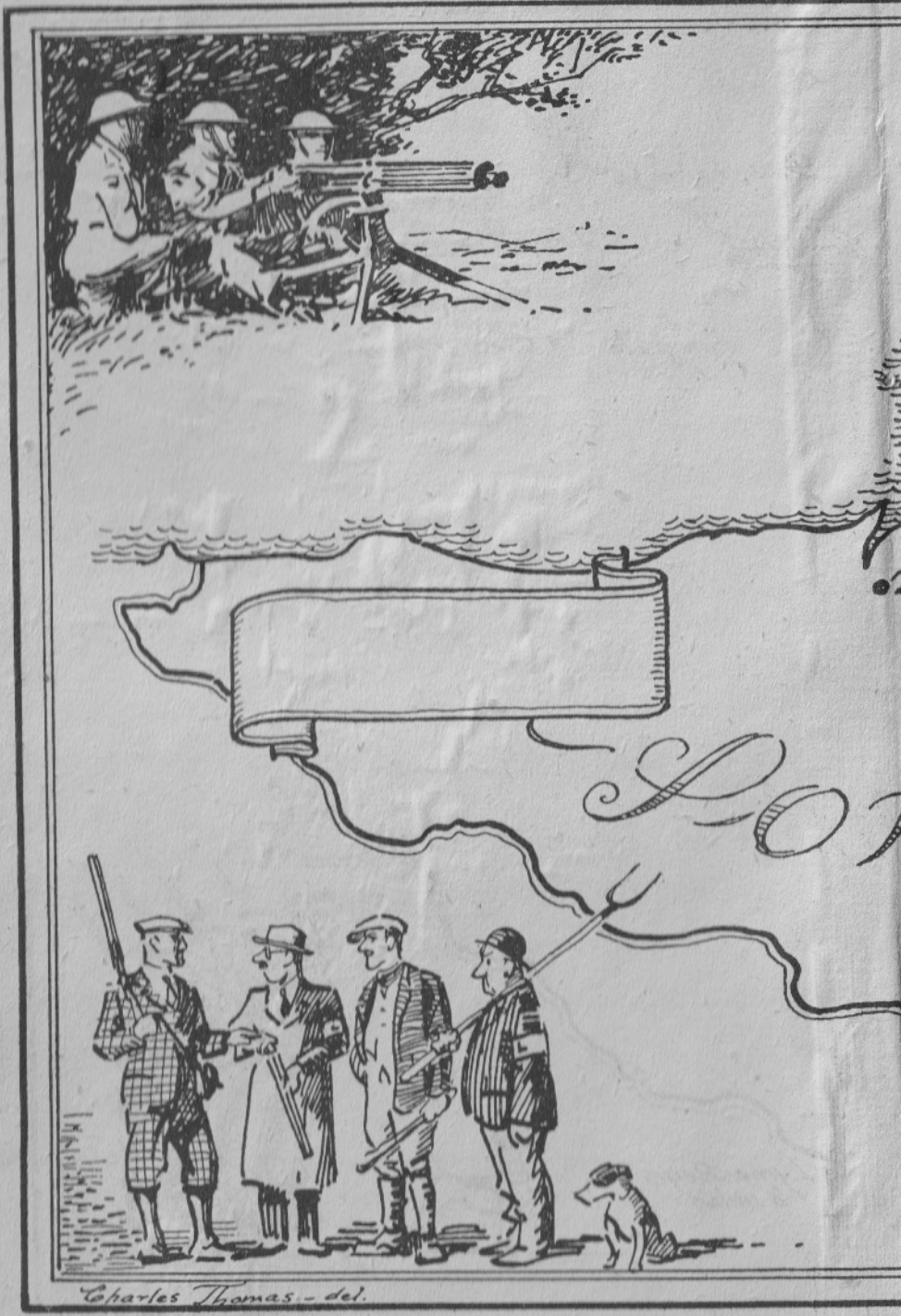


7th Somerset Bn.
HOME GUARD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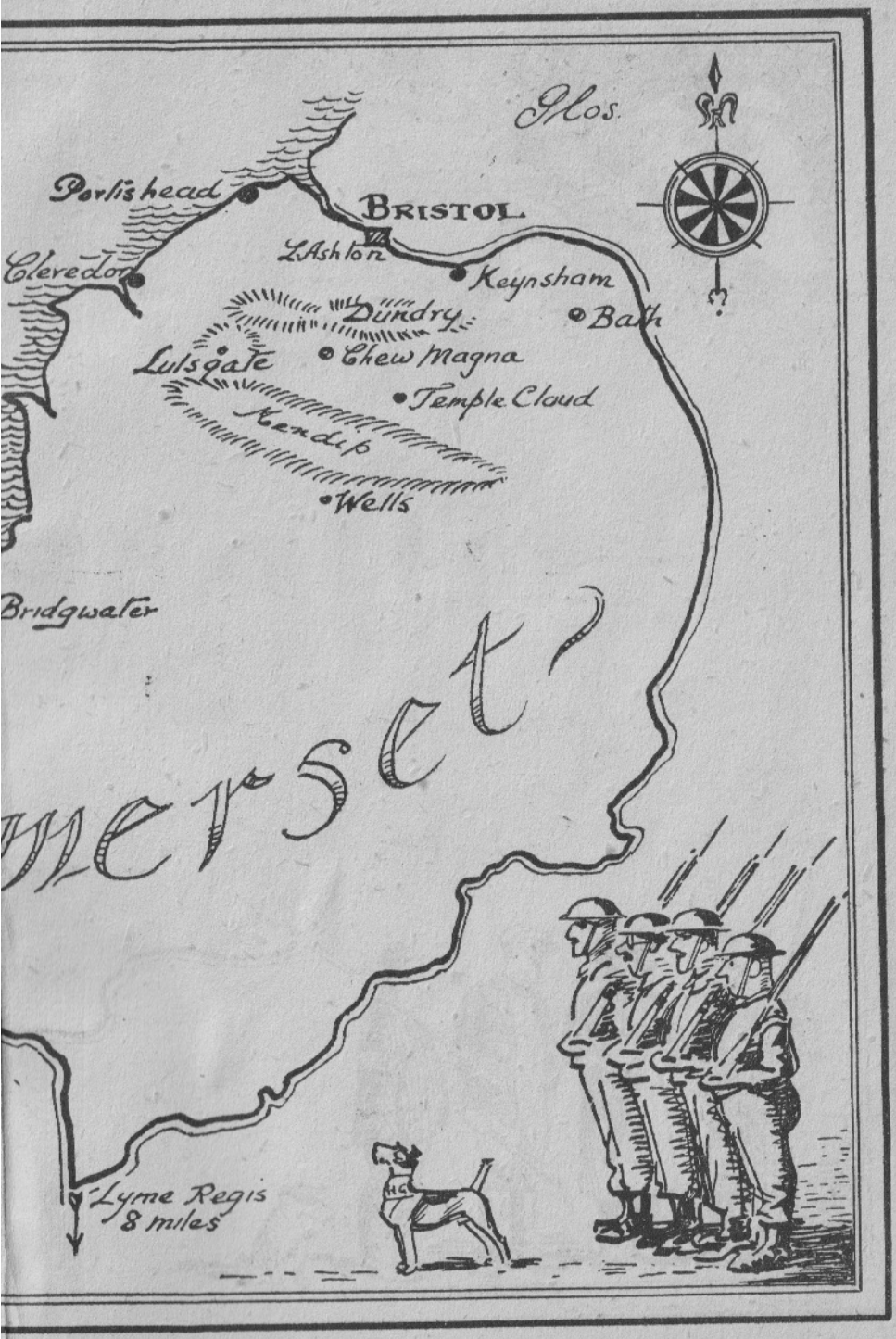
Glos.
Portishead
BRISTOL
Clevedon
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Keynsham
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Dundry
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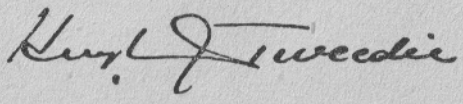
Lulsgate
Temple Cloud
Mendip
Wells
Bridgwater
Somerset
Lyme Regis
8 miles

7TH SOMERSET BATTN.
HOME GUARD

PREFACE

IT is hoped that this little book will serve as a momento to all those who served in the 7th Somerset Battalion of the Home Guard, and also in years to come form some sort of a record of the work done by the Home Guard in a period which will surely stand as a great one in the History of our Country.



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

IN Somerset, as all over England, the response to form a Local Defence Corps was prompt. The call came after the defeat of the French, Belgian and British Arms, and the almost miraculous evacuation of over three hundred thousand British and French Forces from the beaches at Dunkirk, followed by the clarion call of Mr. Churchill that should the enemy follow us to these shores we would fight him on the beaches, in the fields, in the villages and in the towns right through the country. It was to do that fighting the L.D.V. sprang to arms, or such arms as were available.

For we had, in fact, left by far the greater part of the accumulation of the production of weapons of war and ammunition of the last twelve months and more behind in France. It is interesting now to note that all other countries at this time practically threw up the sponge on our behalf. We were beaten ; the Germans were victorious, and even our best friends advised making what terms we could. But in England, whatever responsible authorities may have thought, it never occurred to the people that we could be beaten. There was a sort of grim understanding that, however black things might appear, they—the men of England and Wales and Scotland and Ireland—would have a good deal to say to any invader who set foot on these shores; and so while the Battle of Britain was being fought out in the air, in every town, village and hamlet, enrolling, drilling and organising the L.D.V. went on far into the summer nights, getting ready for the next round : so the 7th Company of the Somerset Home Guard was born.

Late in April, 1940, I had returned from taking and bringing

back convoys across the Atlantic, and during the return voyage we had been listening to the serious news of the Norwegian campaign. Norwegian ships and Danish ships had voluntarily joined the convoy homeward bound to England, their own countries being in enemy hands. I had learnt from the Admiralty that I should not be required again immediately, and so when Col. W. Gibbs of Barrow Court, who had been appointed a Zone Commander in Somerset for the Defence Force, asked me if I would help locally with the Force, I was able to say yes, subject to any further calls from the Admiralty.

Sir Charles Miles was to form a company consisting of five Platoons : Long Ashton, Keynsham, Temple Cloud, Portishead, and Clevedon. The district covered was rather more than 300 square miles, and forms a semi-circle right round the south and west of Bristol City, from the Avon near Bath to the coast line of the Bristol Channel at the mouth of the River Yeo, and back to the mouth of the Avon.

It was the Divisional Police District, administered from Flax Bourton, and it was on the Police we had in the earliest days to rely for information and preliminary organisation, and what the Police did for the L.D.V. in those earliest days was of incalculable value. The five Platoons were founded on the boundaries of the five Police Sergeants of the Area. Sections of L.D.V. were raised in the beat of each village constable, but we soon found that Police boundaries did not always follow Parish boundaries, and the Parish was the most convenient boundary for an L.D.V. Section.

On Tuesday, 21st of May, the first meeting of Platoon Commanders was called to meet at the Police Station under the Chairmanship of Sir Charles Miles of Walton-in-Gordano, and the following were present :

Professor Wallace, M.C.,	from	Long Ashton.
Mr. Scammell, M.C.,	,,	Keynsham.
Captain Eshelby,	,,	Farrington Gurney
Mr. Clements,	,,	Portishead.
Mr. Christie,	,,	Clevedon.

These gentlemen's names had been given to Sir Charles Miles by the Police as likely to be able to form and organise Platoons in the

districts in which they lived. The outline of what was required was gone through and it was emphasised that time was of vital importance as the attack was expected almost any day, and at the same time it was vital not to interfere with the essential work of the country. At this meeting Sir Charles explained that he would himself be unable to command the Company and Colonel Gibbs asked me to take on the work, and it is amusing to remember he said he thought it would occupy me about two afternoons a week.

Several meetings were held at the Police Station in quick succession, and owing to pressure of other work, Mr. Clements of Portishead had to withdraw his name and his place was filled by Colonel Eberle, D.S.O., of Easton-in-Gordano. Mr. Christie of Clevedon gave way to Major Middlemass.

CHAPTER II

Enrolment

ENROLMENT for the Company commenced on Saturday, May 25th, and went on all through Sunday the 26th, and by midnight that night the Company strength was 1,800.

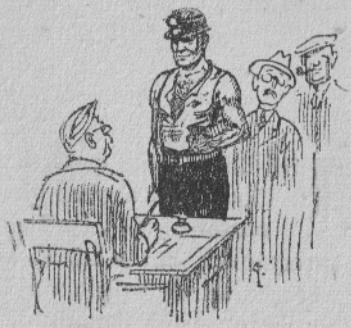
It had been quite impossible to form any sort of estimate of the number who would volunteer, and no machinery existed for dealing with the numbers presenting themselves. Consequently, longer queues formed than could be dealt with and many went home disappointed. The number of enrolment forms which had been sent had quickly run out, and Platoon Commanders had the forms typed and duplicated in order that there should be no delay. Many weeks later all these unofficial forms, which were identical with the official ones except in the type of paper used, were all sent back and the unfortunate Platoon Commanders had to chase all over the country to get the men's signature once more : the first appearance of that bugbear which is known as red tape.

But after all it was to be the only paper with which L.D.V. officers were to be bothered. We had it straight from Field Marshal Sir Edmund Ironside, the first Commander of the L.D.V., that there was to be no paper work, and that there would be no sins laid at the door of L.D.V. Commanders except the sin of omission. We had, in fact, known what was wanted, but no one could help us and we must improvise up to the extreme measure of possibility.

How often three and four years later have we wished the various Area and District Commanders and their staffs could have always had in front of them in large print, extracts from Field Marshal Ironside's original order. It was of course, anyway, bound to be optimistic. In a large and scattered community and with the recipients of orders and instructions away all day in their civilian employment, it was necessary to write and to use the Post, but at least we were spared, in the earlier years, the spate of correspondence from outside which eventually occupied the time of all Home Guard officers.

ENROLMENT

Enrolling the L.D.V., as I watched it through that May Sunday, was a picturesque business in rural districts. Long lines of men had walked or bicycled in to the appointed place. How the word had been passed round in some of the remotest districts on the slopes of the Mendips it was difficult to imagine ; but they were there, all sorts and conditions of men, rather subdued but eager to begin. They hated having to go back home without a weapon, and it was not easy to make them see that, however quick we were, some sort of preliminaries were necessary before any action could be taken as an organised body.



"ENROLLING"

As the forms were filled up, note was taken of men's last war experience, especially those who had done any sort of instructional work. These were noted as possible section leaders, but mostly the section leaders were selected partly by the Platoon Commander and partly by the unanimous choice of the village concerned, and these men were told to get on with it ; and to all we used to say : the arms will be coming along, in the meantime survey your bit of country and make suggestions for road blocks, ambushes, or anything you can think of which would delay an enemy passing through your district.

Few of us realised how very short of arms the country was and that many months were to pass before half our number could be armed, for our numbers were getting big and Platoons unwieldy.

No. 1 Platoon at Long Ashton very soon showed a strength of over 800. No. 2 Keynsham, No. 3 Temple Cloud, and No. 5 Clevedon were each over 600, and we had very soon enrolled over 3,500 Volunteers. What was afterwards called a ceiling had not then been invented and there was no limit to numbers we could enrol ; nor was there any limit to the numbers we could use in the area if, and it was a very big if, we could give them any sort of useful weapon.

CHAPTER III

Organisation

THE L.D.V., like most things, started from modest beginnings. Modesty is a great virtue, even if unfashionable, but in the matter of Military Command it does not quite cover all that is required. In the L.D.V. we started on the assumption that we were to be all equal : no Officers, no N.C.O.'s, just all happily equal, answering the calls of natural leaders without hesitation.

It was a nice idea, but difficult. We all had similar arm bands, worn on the arm and marked "L.D.V." It took what seemed a long time to get enough of these arm bands for all our members, and no sooner were they distributed than it occurred to someone that, in spite of the equality status, it was necessary to distinguish outwardly the chosen leader. Appearances are sometimes deceptive, and to address the biggest and ugliest man in a party with a view to getting that party to get a move on, might cause ruffled feelings in the breast of the real chosen leader who happened to be of the small and inconspicuous type.

So bands were issued marked Company, Platoon, and Section Leaders. This was a step forward, but it was also apparent that a Company with a total strength equal to, or rather more than, a brigade, and with Platoons two and three times the strength of an ordinary Company, was unbalanced, and more controlling staff was necessary—especially more junior Officers and N.C.O.'s. The Company was raised to the status of a Battalion, the Platoons became Companies, and Sections became Platoons. The equivalent of N.C.O.'s were created and given similar badges, although at first it was difficult to know what to call them.

The strength of Companies and the size of the Area they covered caused some concern. It was very soon found that a Company Commander at Clevedon could not well organise and control the area which included Yatton, Cleeve, Backwell, Flax Bourton, Wraxall, and Nailsea. We were lucky to find Major Leman at

Bickley House, Cleeve, as his introduction enabled No. 5 Company to be split. No. 6 Company was formed, known as the Yatton Company, and No. 5 stopped at the Kenn River in one direction, and at Tickenham and Walton-in-Gordano to the eastward. No. 3 Company was also covering too large an area, therefore a Chew Magna Company was formed under the Command of Major Terrell, and his area, with H.Q. at Chew Magna, embraced the Harptrees, Ubley, Compton Martin, Chew Stoke, Bishop Sutton, Hinton Blewitt, Litton, and all the northern slopes of Mendip, extending as far as the Miner's Arms and Castle of Comfort. The eastern half of the original Company remained No. 3, with H.Q. at Temple Cloud, and included Ston Easton, Farrington Gurney, Paulton, Hallatrow, Timsbury, Farmborough, Clutton, and High Littleton.

The next to be dealt with was No. 1 Company which, while not so large in area as the others, was over 800 strong and geographically embraced three separate communities, Long Ashton and Dundry Hill with Winford and Felton, Bishopsworth (which was our most populated district in the whole Battalion Area) and Leigh Woods (which covered all the high country served by the road over the Suspension Bridge into Bristol). The new Companies became No. 8 Bishopsworth, and No. 9 Leigh Woods under Major Elton and Major Robertson respectively.

Later, when Major Wallace became Second in Command of the Battalion, Major Berry commanded No. 1 Company, and he in turn was followed by Major Stacey. In spite of some pressure from Major Scammell, Commanding No. 2 (Keynsham) Company, to divide his Company also into two or three, we continued to remain nine Companies, which in the matter of duplicating orders with a limited staff was quite enough.

All this time, that is, up to September, 1940, we had remained more or less super-imposed on Police H.Q. The Battalion H.Q. made Flax Bourton Police Headquarters its Battle H.Q., the administration being done at the Battalion Commander's house. Most Company H.Q.'s were at the local Police Station, but the requirements of the Police were themselves growing, and it was necessary to find separate Company and Platoon Headquarters. As far as the Battalion went, the Administration Headquarters remained at Wraxall House, and by the courtesy and kindness of

the Director of the Long Ashton Research Station, we were accommodated there as Battle Headquarters.

In due time military titles were adopted. The Battalion Commander became a Lieut.-Colonel, the Company Commanders Majors, with Seconds in Command Captains, and Platoon Commanders Lieuts., with 2nd-Lieuts. to assist them according to the strength of Platoons, which necessarily varied from a strength of over a hundred down to thirty or forty.

In August, 1940, I was glad to get a letter from an old friend from South African days, telling me he had arrived in this country to see if he could in any way help, and could I put him in the way of doing anything useful. I wrote back to say I was looking for a Second in Command, one who could give his time to the work and be prepared to take over the Battalion in case I was required by the Admiralty. I had in fact been on the point of taking over the Convoys on the Cardiff–Bordeaux run when France fell. Major Jesser Coope came at once and was with us two years. He was for some time my only assistant, and although not very young, the work he got through was tremendous. It is not without interest to remind readers of these notes that Major Jesser Coope was one of the pioneers under Cecil Rhodes in Rhodesia. He was captured in the Jameson Raid, and was on trial for High Treason ; later he was Chief Scout, and conducted Rhodes and his party to the famous meeting with Lobengula in the Matoppos, and again he had served through the strenuous bush fighting in East Africa under General Smuts, so that we had acquired a leader of considerable experience in that sort of fighting in which we expected to be involved.

During the autumn of 1940 we were gradually issued with Denim overalls, useful as producing some sort of uniformity, but useless as protection against wet and cold. Had the enemy struck at this Country in 1940, '41, or '42, they would at least have been faced with a motley crew with many different kinds of weapons—from the sporting gun and rifle to the pitch-fork.

In the early days of the L.D.V. we owed no allegiance to any particular Army Command, and this fact did

make for the really remarkable progress achieved in the first few weeks and months. At some date during the summer of 1940 the first Area Commander came into being. I do not remember that we were officially informed of his arrival or the extent of his responsibility, but Commanders followed each other in fairly rapid succession, and each new arrival meant two days going round the Area and explaining what we were hoping to do. Each one had some suggestions to make, but on the whole appeared to approve of what had been done. All these officers were interested solely in the operational side of the work, and it was not until much later that administration of the Home Guard came under what had then become Sub-Districts. At first we had a Zone Commander, and then direct administration through T.A.A., which was straightforward enough. When Sub-Districts were established the spate of paper work really set in in earnest, and as the Sub-District Commanders acquired Staff officers, so the volume swelled. Each department had naturally to justify its existence, and as in this District there were no regular troops, Home Guard received the full weight of the combined typewriters and telephones. The latter was particularly destructive, and it was never realised that at one end of the telephone there were relays of ladies on constant watch while at the receiving end there was the Battalion Commander or his wife, one of whom must always be in the house if the other was out.

Things were made more difficult by the adoption of a curious jargon by the Army, sometimes, one thought, designed to avoid using plain English, possibly designed to deceive the enemy, actually I fear it only succeeded in deceiving the Home Guard. After practice, however, and ignoring all the brackets and strokes, it was usually possible to catch the two or three words which mattered.

During all these first months it was impressed on the Home Guard that, however important it was to get on with the work and though the enemy might attack any day, there was no money, and anything the Battalion Commander spent came out of his own pocket. A typewriter was borrowed from a good friend in the village, and being not so skilled as I should have liked to be on that instrument, and spending most of the daylight hours on the road, it took me far into the night to type out the necessary orders

To supplement this I at first made use of good friends who offered to help : Mr. Harrington Fry of Long Ashton, Mr. Coate of the Cider Works at Nailsea, and the Timber Control in Clifton. This was a laborious business and meant taking out the manuscript to whoever had time to do some typing, and collecting it the next day. Gradually a Staff of sorts was formed ; but as they had all to be voluntary they necessarily fixed their own hours. The W.V.S. was helpful early on and sent me one or two ladies from Bristol, but I think my first regular clerical helper was Mr. Knight-Adkin. Then the powers-that-be decreed that Battalions were to have what was called an Administrative Assistant. The first one found the work very hard, especially the loading and unloading of lorries, which was one of our every-day tasks. He remained for a time and then disappeared, causing no little confusion, as he had just been long enough to get a certain amount of the Q side of the work in his hands, and it was not easy to unravel what he had done or not done. Temporarily, one of the Platoon Commanders came to help, but he was unable to type, had little experience of office work, and was shortly called up ; so I was again bereft of help. We were, however, now to be allowed an Adjutant and Quarter-master in addition to the Administrative Assistant. Capt. Hardwicke arrived to fill the former vacancy and I was lucky to get Mrs. Shore, a neighbour, to take on the work of Administrative Assistant. In addition, an unofficial Battalion Staff was gradually formed. Major Harrison, M.C., became Chief Staff Officer, Capt. Bennett Intelligence Officer, Capt. Latimer Signals Officer, Lieut. Saunders and later Lieut. Grundy, Ammunition Officer, Lieut. Cockbaine Transport Officer. Luckily in those earlier days it was possible to make and appoint such Staff Officers as were necessary, later red tape shut down and it was difficult even to fill vacancies. It is difficult to say why this should have been so ; Home Guard officers cost the country nothing, not even a first-class travel voucher, and could be compensated or buried at exactly the same price as O.R.'s.

The organisation of Battle H.Q. at the Long Ashton Research Station almost deserves a chapter to itself, although of little interest perhaps except to those who worked there. Let it suffice to say that, thanks to Professor Barker and Professor Wallace, everything was done for our convenience and benefit so far as accommodation

is concerned, and always we had the Board Room or some other equally convenient room at our disposal. Here it was we held our monthly routine Company Commander's meetings, which were of considerable value.

Of the internal working of H.Q., supposing the enemy had obtained a footing in the country, we had many exercises and practices always valuable and never satisfying, principally because it was, in fact, a very difficult task to control nine Companies stretching over an area of 300 square miles, and because of our lack of knowledge of what form the enemy attack would take, and our constantly changing role as the conditions of the War swayed this way and that all over the world. Some details of our communication difficulties will appear in another chapter.

At the end of four years we were still endeavouring to perfect the machinery, and still not satisfied. While Battalion H.Q. was growing, so were Company Headquarters, and Company H.Q. developed largely on lines to suit the temperament of their O.C.'s. It was interesting to note the somewhat meticulous and detailed organisation of some Company Commanders and the less formal methods of others, and these others were not by any means behindhand in their field work, but in administration work they were poles apart. The great thing seemed to be that it was the Company Commander who best knew his district, his Platoon Commanders, and the men, and he developed his Company administration to best suit his area. It is not necessary to pretend that all were equally good, but on the whole they were very good and unstinted in the time they gave and the zeal and attention they displayed. Of the Platoon Commanders and Platoon Headquarters much the same could be said. They developed under the Company Commanders their own technique, both for administration and training, and although immensely handicapped by a mixture of weapons, or no weapons, by an almost total lack of ammunition and in many cases no previous military experience at all, there was not one who doubted his own Platoon's ability to give a good account of themselves, for had it come, the weight of the fighting must have fallen on individual Platoons and the direction of the fight round a defended locality or ambush would have devolved on the Platoon Commander.

CHAPTER IV

Weapons Distribution

IN the L.D.V., and indeed for a long period after the L.D.V. had become Home Guard, the question of arming the men was an insoluble problem.

The fact had to be faced that for a long time there would not be enough arms to go round. The attack, if it came, might come any day. The problem, therefore, was not only the weapons we had, but how best they should be distributed. As has been noted in a previous chapter, there was unhappiness in the Home Guard because, for two years and more, many men who enrolled could not be supplied with a weapon, and considerable thought and anxiety was entailed in the matter of distribution. Should there be weakness everywhere, or should some details be comparatively strong and others entirely denuded ?

We started with eight hundred ·303 rifles and some one hundred shot guns, besides an unknown number of the latter in the hands of individual Home Guards. The hundred odd shot guns distributed were those picked out from a much larger number handed in to the Flax Bourton Police Station in response to a public appeal for arms for the Home Guard. As I went through this collection with the Police Inspector I remember remarking that if the Germans come it will be all right, but if they don't come and the owners of these guns all want them back, I foresee some correspondence ahead—and there was. The guns had to be got out. The attack might come that night or next week: no one knew. There was no clerical staff, no labour and no transport. Luckily I happened to own a Ford utility van, and this van in the course of four years was to carry many tons of Home Guard equipment and clothing. I was the

driver and also supplied the labour, although at the Police Station I always got willing hands for loading up. Sergt. Barrett was invaluable, giving help in every way and keeping a record of all that went out. Later on, too, I had the services of Mrs. Briggs of Wraxall, to drive. But it was at the other end that difficulties occurred. Home Guards being at work all day, it was seldom that anyone was available to help. Temple Cloud Home Guard store I shall always remember. It was up two flights of steps, and carrying say a hundred rifles, four at a time up those steps, was good exercise. When boxes of ammunition came along it was worse ; and bales of clothing I had to open, and carry in so many trousers and blouses at a time.

For the first three months or so one used to do three or four trips a day, the evenings and Sundays being devoted to operational work when L.D.V.'s or Home Guards were available.

No sooner had the allowance of ·303 rifles been distributed than a thousand ·300 American rifles arrived. These were to replace the ·303. At first there was much rejoicing, as it was understood rifles were coming in sufficient numbers to arm the Battalion, and this was, I believe, the intention ; but somewhere *en route* a very large number of rifles were destroyed by enemy action, an enemy success from which we never fully recovered. The American rifles were supplied completely embedded in grease, and many an L.D.V. will remember cleaning rifles when he has forgotten many other incidents of his Home Guard life. The first delivery of American rifles was one thousand, and as Nos. 2 and 3 Companies (Keynsham and Temple Cloud) were each approximately 500 strong, and it was inexpedient to mix the two types of rifle, the whole of the arms from these two Companies were withdrawn and they were re-issued with the American rifles, 500 each—a matter of considerable labour and transport.

This issue was the cause of lasting trouble, for it was a long time before any more American rifles arrived, while continual pressure was applied to make us deliver up the remaining ·303. Closely following the issue of American rifles came a supply of Tommy guns, no sooner distributed than withdrawn and replaced by Sten guns—the latter a splendid Home Guard weapon, and in such good supply as eventually to provide every man with a personal weapon, our rifle strength sticking at 1,800.

During the autumn of 1940 and through 1941, Lewis machine guns came along in fair numbers and served to bolster up the Companies who were short of rifles. These guns had been withdrawn from aircraft and were issued with so many injunctions as to the heating of the barrels and the difficulty of sighting that they were regarded by the Home Guard with a measure of suspicion. They turned out to be very useful and reliable weapons for our purpose.

As the months passed we had word of various different weapons with which we were to be armed. One that we spent a good many hours over was the 12-pounder gun, ex Horse Artillery. We were to have, I believe, fifteen of these and the positions where they were to be mounted and camouflaged from air observation required a certain amount of planning, as well as the means of getting them to the position selected, for we had neither horses nor tractors, and though no doubt one or the other would have been forthcoming had the guns arrived, they never did. But we did get Northover Projectors : a simple instrument for firing grenades and phosphorous bottles up to a range of 300 yards.

In the early days fire was our chief offensive weapon. Rifles with ten rounds per rifle in the hands of men without practice were not very formidable ; shot guns with S.G. shot were useful ; but fire was the only means we had of dealing with armoured vehicles or tanks until we got the Blacker Bombard, and even then still remained the weapon which everyone could handle effectively with the minimum of instruction and direction.

The first means of making fire was the Molotoff Cocktail, mostly home made, but gradually replaced by a very efficient service issue.

If, by careful concealment, a convoy of enemy vehicles could be enticed into a road cutting within range of fifty or so men armed with these phosphorous bottles and backed up later with Bombards, a useful kill might have taken place.

The Home Guard were all the time at war with other departments. The routine work of England must go on, war or no war, and I well remember a certain unit spending a long hot Sunday digging pits and trenches along the edge of a wood

nicely concealed by a good hairy hedge, and taking infinite trouble not to disturb the outer foliage, remove soil, and all the rest, only to find when they returned next Sunday that the District Council road workers had come along and cut the hedge down to three-inch stubs, entirely exposing all the field work behind. Expostulations were no good, and anyway too late. As the foreman said : "She ain't been done for a matter of five year and the surveyor 'll be down along soon maybe, and make a tidy fuss if she bain't done ! ! ! " Or the Timber Control would come along where a position had been carefully chosen for its field of fire and proceed to erect line upon line of timber stacks. One often thought it was lucky the Home Guards and other departments were like Box and Cox and never met.

Later, the Blacker Bombard came forward in good numbers. It was an excellent and really powerful weapon, on rather a clumsy mounting which limited its mobility ; but as time went by and training improved we had in the Battalion teams that could dismount the gun from a lorry or trailer, mount it in the selected position and fire the first round in 1 minute 50 seconds, not much behind the time of an ordinary field gun—and they could hit the target. These Bombards, carefully concealed and laid to cover a column of vehicles held up by fire, might have been very useful.

We had several types of automatic weapons, among which were Lewis machine guns (ground and aircraft types), Browning and Vickers machine guns and Browning automatic rifles. With all these weapons considerable proficiency was obtained.

CHAPTER V

Communications

THE Battalion area measured east and west approximately 35 miles. The southern boundary was very irregular, but taking Bristol as the centre it was approximately a 15 miles radius, and the whole area between 300 and 400 square miles. The north was bounded by Bristol City and the River Avon ; to the south the boundary lay along the ridge of the Mendip Hills ; to the east again the River Avon ; to the west the Bristol Channel.

The dominating features were : to the south the Mendip and to the north the Dundry Ridge, and in between a series of hills of varied heights, with wooded valleys affording unlimited cover for troops. Most of the roads and lanes were deep set and could not be well observed from a distance. It was in fact necessary in order to cover the country to man a considerable number of Observation Posts, and a still greater problem to connect these Posts to Battalion H.Q.

Our first duty was to watch the whole countryside so that no enemy should land from the air or pass through the country without being observed and reported. To do this, Observation Posts were established on all the highest features and they were manned nightly from dark to dawn, commencing from the third day after the first enrolment.

A more difficult problem was how and by what routes these Observation Posts should be able to communicate what they saw to someone in a position to act. A chain had to be forged from observer to Platoon H.Q., from Platoon to Company H.Q., and from Company to Battalion H.Q. Information in and out and lateral from Company to Company and Platoon to neighbouring Platoons was essential if what strength we had, meagre as it was, was to be used to the fullest possible extent. This factor was not readily grasped in the Home Guard ; weapons and the handling of such were the over-riding interests. Nor did communication receive much more than cold water from the Military Authorities.

The first effort made was to build up a strong group of Despatch Riders on motor-cycles with real knowledge of how to get about the country in all weather, in daylight and dark. There were plenty of machines but, it soon transpired, not many riders who could find their way about. Mostly these machines were owned by men who went daily to work and back by one route, or if they had a holiday went out of the district altogether. They all had to be taught to read a map and get through to their object by alternative routes when necessary. To do this we built up a bi-weekly service that took the routine correspondence backwards and forwards between Battalion and Company Headquarters. After three months we were getting on ; then we had the first minor accident, causing damage to the value of £5, which the War Office refused to pay, and issued an order that motor-cycles privately owned were only to be used operationally, except at the owner's risk. They could be used when the Germans came, but training was at the risk of the owner, who should be properly insured.

These motor-cycles were almost invariably insured against third party risks only, and in fact no Insurance Company would give complete cover. It is true, after a good deal of correspondence the War Office did name a Company who would fully insure the machines, but at a premium most Home Guards could not face. The machines were usually owned by the younger men and often paid for by parents on a hire-purchase basis. They could not face the risks to the machine, which increased as the days drew in, and it was already getting dark when Home Guard work started. There was, moreover, the increasing difficulty of getting repairs done, and often enough the man's livelihood depended on his machine getting him backwards and forwards to work. A promising infant was knocked on the head by what one must consider was the lack of someone to realise the importance of communications in a rural area, and the fact that to be liberal to these valuable men who had come forward with their machines, and only wanted them maintained in running order, would have cost the taxpayer so very little out of the enormous burden he had to bear. However, the training of despatch riders was, if not dead, very seriously limited, and other means of communication must be explored.

I had a neighbour, an ex-Sapper, Professor Ellis of the London

University, lately evacuated to Bristol. Professor Ellis offered to provide the Battalion with portable wireless sets, but knowing something of the restrictions of wireless in war time I was not surprised to learn, in reply to enquiries, that wireless was verboten to the Home Guard.

My thoughts naturally turned to the flashing lamp. Here was an instrument which all my life I had used as a daily means of communication : from handling a Fleet to asking a friend to dinner. In war time, with wireless silence, it was indispensible at sea. In the convoys sailing every day it was being used by many men with little or no previous training, under very much more difficult conditions than we should experience on land ; but both Home Security and Police had a horror of flashing lamps, usually supposed to be directing enemy aircraft.

It was necessary to design a lamp with a narrow arc of visibility. This Professor Ellis did. The lamp had, in fact, only four yards visibility on each side of the object on which the lamp was laid, at a range of approximately five miles. The light was produced by an ordinary bicycle lamp battery, and these, in the early days of the war, were both cheap and in good supply. These lamps were beautifully designed and put together, each fitted with a telescope with battery box attached. Later they were considerably improved by Doctor Jackson of Bristol University, and became known as the Jackson Lamp. In the hands of experts this lamp was of great efficiency, but to the more or less amateur, the accuracy with which it had to be laid, and the fact that the slightest movement out of alignment made the light invisible, were great stumbling blocks. We had in our efforts to ensure secrecy made the alignment rather too accurate. Nor was the strength sufficient in sunny daylight hours or in misty weather. Largely the efficiency of the lamp depended on the efficiency of the man behind the lamp, but not entirely so ; there were certain stations particularly prone to mist, and later, when the ban on the Home Guard using flashing lamps was not only lifted but signalling was encouraged, Aldis lamps were substituted for daylight work and in misty weather.

It was necessary to position the Signal Stations where they could communicate with each other, and the same problem occurred as in the more numerous Observation Posts, *i.e.* how to pass the

information received to someone with authority to act, in fact, to connect every Signal Station by telephone to a Company, or at least a Platoon H.Q.

Telephone wire was at a premium and instruments were more so, but in July 1940 I had found Capt. Latimer, who had interested himself with the best results in the Signal Section of No. 5 (Clevedon) Company. I persuaded him to take on the role of Battalion Signals Officer and communications came under his care, with the help of Lieut. Crowlie and Lieut. Gray—men who had much experience of wireless and signalling generally—and to them the Battalion is indebted for building up a communication service.

Capt. Latimer managed to collect bits of wire and condemned instruments ; we bought five Aldis lamps and took over six months to get the authorities to approve the purchase. Eventually in 1944, we actually had a certain amount of land line provided for us, and connected up the signal stations at Storm Point, Dundry and Maes Knoll and back to Filwood Farm, and thence to the Bristol Garrison Command.

Our communications thus gradually built up rested first on the G.P.O. telephone. This in large scale exercises was never satisfactory, chiefly because we had in the Battalion Area twelve different exchanges, and these, to communicate with each other, had to pass through the Bristol Exchange. That meant congestion and delay, caused, we were usually told, because Home Guard exercises were always on Sundays and on that day the G.P.O. had a reduced staff, but that in the event of operations there would be an increased staff and no delay. It was obvious, however, that there would, in the event of operations, be a greatly increased demand for the telephone by all the Civil Services, so that we were well advised to organise independently of the G.P.O. while taking all they had to offer.

So to back up the G.P.O. telephone we had Despatch Riders, Signal Stations, a certain number of land lines, and a very efficient Pigeon Service under the able control of Mr. Read, whose main loft was at Long Ashton within a few yards of Battalion Battle H.Q.

In addition, we had the very valuable help of the Police who had a number of direct lines in the Battalion Area, and the Divisional Police Station was eventually linked up by direct line to Battalion

Battle H.Q. To supplement this, the Police had a complete Despatch Rider Service which on certain routes would have been invaluable.

In the Spring of 1944 wireless sets were issued to the Home Guard ; too late to mean real efficiency—but interesting exercises were carried out in each Company conducted by R/T from Company Commander to Platoons. We never had enough sets to complete each Company, nor were we ever very successful in connecting Battalion H.Q. with Sub-District H.Q. in Bristol ; but that was not the responsibility of the Battalion.

The Battalion communications were perhaps the part of the organisation both the most difficult and demanding the greatest amount of practice, and praise is due not only to the Battalion Signals Staff Officers already mentioned, but to all the Company Signals Officers and their staffs who worked so hard and gave up so many hours to attain efficiency, and a word of thanks is especially due to all those ladies who formed so important a link in the completion of our communications organisation. The Signal Sections will long remember the many hours of disappointment when, after long hours in fog or rain exercises had to be abandoned, no visual signals being possible ; or, again, the lack of success with the first wireless sets. Certainly the motto of the Signal Staff was try, try again ; but it was worth it and I was satisfied that a few hours of Action Stations would put the polish on our efforts.

CHAPTER VI

Administration

IT would hardly be possible for any Home Guard Officer to be other than critical of the administration of the Home Guard, which was both inefficient and clumsy. The paper work attained such a volume by 1943–44 that the whole organisation bid fair to be swamped, and officers who should have devoted every moment of time to training were kept glued to their desks.

Like most Battalion Commanders, I had had a pretty wide experience of administration. In one Command I had over twenty thousand officers and men and a hundred ships, and ship husbandry is a matter of detail and consequently correspondence, and yet I sometimes wondered if the paper work in that Command, which was very large, was much worse than that required for a single Home Guard Battalion.

I had too, at different times, been charged with reducing a definite stream of paper on certain subjects, which is always difficult, for papers, like the flotsam in a stream, get intertwined, and it is difficult to pick up this one or that one as being superfluous. The only way, perhaps, is to dam the stream altogether and wait to see if any of the paper normally flowing down is missed.

We started well, the first Director General of the Home Guard stated there was to be one paper and one paper only. The causes of the direful change from this high ambition came perhaps from two causes. First the A.C.I.'s. It is doubtful if it could be found that a single one of these documents enabled the Home Guard to despatch more neatly a single Boche, or more of them—and that was all the Home Guard were for. In the early days, when the War Office was too busy to worry about Home Guards, or had not yet taken to itself the

extra staff, A.C.I.'s passed us by, and then, when these documents began to refer to Home Guard, it was usually possible to stop them before they reached Company Commanders ; but as usual, before long the more deadly feature of the A.C.I. came, requiring a return. The rivulet grew to a rushing stream.

In the early days, when it was far more important to do things and get things done than to write about them, we were based on the Police, who were splendid, I found, and then on the Territorial Association, also splendid, throughout the four years and more. If only Battalion Commanders had been able to deal direct with the T.A. all through, much waste of time and energy might have been saved. Even in this it seemed we started right with what was known as a Zone Commander, although apparently he had little power. What was wanted was a fairly big noise at Territorial H.Q. with very wide powers of discretion for the County Home Guard.

The interposing of Sub-Areas and Sub-Districts and presumably Sector Commands between Battalions and T.A. was simply adding a fifth wheel to the coach as far as administration was concerned. Had the same officers and staff been able to devote themselves entirely to operational matters it would have been a great help, especially if the young staff officers first spent three months with Marshal Tito's forces, or the Maquis, and were men who could really teach from the lessons they had learnt. As it was, the staff officers were too much concerned with the interpretation of regulations, knew little of either this war or the last, did not understand the Home Guard, and knew nothing of the area. It wasn't, of course, any fault of theirs ; no one probably rebelled more heartily at being tied down to a desk in the middle of a great war than they, but the net result to the Home Guard was more paper work.

The second main cause of bad administration was, it seems, the well-known British characteristic of never trusting the man on the spot. Even if ten per cent. of Battalion Commanders should be villains and disposed to play fast and loose with public money, it would still have paid a handsome dividend—saving thousands of pounds of the Taxpayer's money, and hours of work—had the simple expedient been adopted of allowing the Battalion Commander a capitation grant to run the Battalion expenses, these of course being audited from time to time. Not less than fifty per cent. of

the expenses would have been saved, also the time of innumerable clerks and typists throughout the country.

It is true that a small Training Grant was introduced, so hedged about with regulations that it was nearly useless, and later a Battalion Fund was introduced, also hedged around, but released in 1944 except for the matter of transport, the most vexed question of all.

Transport in a large and scattered rural Battalion was an important matter. In the earlier days, with a basic ration of petrol and no acute fear of being left without tyres, Home Guards largely used their own cars. Gradually private cars were squeezed off the road and it became a matter of hiring, hiring to bring in outlying men for drills and exercises, hiring to take men to the range, hiring almost every Sunday for some purpose or other. There was in fact no difficulty in hiring, but the method created in order to hire grew more and more involved. The last effort I saw, and I had experiences of a good many, had, I think, twenty-two headings, and a little novelette, on the back of which was, I understand, abstracts from regulations in case the Battalion Commander concerned had had the good fortune to overlook any of them. This, or similar documents, had to be rendered in quadruplicate prior to the undertaking proposed, and authority obtained. So that an unfortunate Platoon Commander recovering on Monday from his efforts on the previous day, must begin thinking about what he would be able to do the following Sunday, in order that any applications for transport might trickle up through Company, Battalion, and Sub-District, and back again before next Sunday came round. Certainly District Commanders realised that the instructions were impossible to carry out, and were quite prepared to sign the authority to enable T.A. to pay the bill after the event had in fact taken place, merely proving that the regulations were bad and unworkable.

Perhaps after transport, subsistence allowance gave the greatest trouble, in spite of the fact that for some unaccountable reason this was managed direct with T.A., and was not sent backwards and forwards through Districts or Sectors. Subsistence allowance was introduced in spite of the united protests of Battalion Commanders, and for some obscure reason which it was never possible to find out. Whatever the reason may have been, it was a great

waste of public money, and was so small in amount to the individual as to be of little interest, but involved the Company Commanders in signing monthly a document stating the money was spent on food, that it was necessary and could not be otherwise obtained—knowing full well that actually at the time there were no shops open, that nothing could be bought, and that the thing was, in fact, a farce.

Transfers, enrolments, and discharges—these were all a source of much paper work and could have been simplified. Probably most Battalions turned over three times during the four-and-a-half years of their existence, and not a great many of the original L.D.V. remained to see the Stand Down.

Compulsory service in the Home Guard, introduced in 1942, was in the main responsible for the system of transfers. Compulsory service may have been necessary in some districts, but it cut across the whole spirit of the Force, which was founded and bound together by goodwill.

Some Companies remained at full strength of volunteers throughout ; others were not so fortunate, especially those that were ripped open to supply crews for A.A. guns or Coast Defence.

If I have in this chapter criticised the administration of the Home Guard unduly, it is regretted ; but it was the bugbear, and I think the unnecessary bugbear, of the whole movement—at least as regards the officers charged with the duty of making it work.

CHAPTER VII

Training

THE training of the Home Guard to meet invasion, hourly expected, by a modern army, immensely strong and flushed with victory, was no easy job. We had no nucleus to start on, no instructors, no knowledge even of what we were to be armed with to meet this formidable foe. Nothing but unlimited goodwill and determination to give this invader at least some reason for being sorry he ever landed in England.

In this particular county we had practically no regular troops. Such as there were found full employment in re-organising and training new recruits for the next round.

Time, and the fact that the work of the country must go on, meant that Home Guards were fully employed all day, and only after completion of a normal day's work were they able to turn their attention to fitting themselves to fight.

At first there was a sense of frustration : here we all were, ready to start, but no arms and just nothing we could do about it. Even when some arms began to filter through there were not nearly enough to go round, and officers' organising powers were highly taxed arranging rosters of drill.

The pace in the first six months was tremendous. It must be remembered that a very large proportion of the Home Guard had never held a rifle in their lives, and had no sooner handled a ·303 rifle than they were given a ·300 American ; they had no sooner learnt something of a Tommy gun than they were given a Sten gun ; and that although they were to fight with an American rifle, any practice on the range they might have must be with the ·303 British rifle. Certainly it made the same sort of bang, and even that was a novelty to many, but otherwise it was not a very valuable substitute. Truly the training of the Home Guard under the conditions then ruling might well have seemed impossible.

Not so to the Company and Platoon Commanders. They, in an incredibly short space of time, produced Sections and Squads in

some sort of military shape, and all the time came the unspoken thought : will it be to-night or shall we get another week or so ? Every hour was valuable. No wonder we were sometimes criticised for trying to run before we could walk. We had to. We had to jump many of the preliminaries in order to be in some sort of shape to meet what might come almost any day, and with but little warning.

Looking back on those days and knowing now, even better than we did then, the dire peril in which the nation stood, it seems it would have been worth while and good policy to have called out the Home Guard for a week, to have freed them during that week from all other work and let them get on with their preparations. Such a week would not only have assisted the technical training, but it would have given a better chance to select leaders, to see who there was in each Section, to examine the ground on which each Platoon had to fight; to do, in fact, all the many and varied jobs that had to be done while no one was on the spot, and which would have been so much more valuable had it been possible for the Squad, Platoon or Company Commander to always be present while explaining, for instance, the reasons for the selection of an ambush or defended locality.

However, the Hun missed his chance or was unable to take it, and in four years and more, even with the attenuated hours per day available, in the aggregate we had a good many training hours.

The backbone of the training and its success is due to the zeal and energy of the Company and Platoon Commanders, ably backed up by their N.C.O.'s. Later on, too late to be fully effective, we had Training Officers, Adjutant and P.S.L.'s. The latter, Sergt.-Major Clark and Sergt.-Major Jones, came earlier than the others, and were especially valuable when the introduction of what was called Battle Drill took place. We had, in fact, been developing on the same lines for some time, but the official introduction of Battle Drill made possibly the biggest single jump in our field training progress. It was eminently suited as a foundation for the guerrilla tactics we were aiming at, in which the aim was to get the whole Battalion decentralised into parties of ten men and a leader, and so work together that every man should know and trust his leader, and the leader should know intimately the abilities and capabilities of every man in his party.

TRAINING

The foundations of the Battalion training were laid in the first six months and were held, I think, right through. In the latter years, as we became more and more governed by A.C.I.'s and Military Commands, there was a dangerous tendency to look upon the Home Guard Battalion as a regiment of the line ; perhaps the very names Battalions, Companies, and Platoons were confusing to the young staff officers to whom such names meant a barrack square, an adjutant, an orderly-room and a sergeant-major.

A battalion 3,000 strong, companies of battalion strength and platoons of company strength, scattered in small numbers all over the county and only available at times and on days when regular soldiers rest, was confusing, and very few regular soldiers with whom I came in contact appeared to realise the short-comings and the possibilities of the Home Guard. They could be trained into first-class Home Guards on the lines of the guerrillas who did such great work in France and Yugoslavia, or they could remain very second-class regiments of the line.

Our first weapon, and one which no one else had ready made, was knowledge of the country, but even this was not nearly so wide-spread as might be supposed. While we were waiting for weapons, there was much to be done. First, develop knowledge of the locality ; learn to move unobserved, both by day and night ; learn all about camouflage ; select positions for ambush ; select defended localities and site all-round defence. Learn where the neighbouring Platoon or Company was, and how to communicate with them ; learn how to take advantage of cover, where to put up dummy defence works. In fact, there was no end to what enterprising Home Guards could learn about their own country-side and how best to make use of it, to the hindrance of the enemy.

"CAMOUFLAGE"

Sunday only came once a week, and that was the only time when daylight exercises could be staged to last more than an hour or two. The best exercises were probably those which covered both dark and some daylight hours, and experience showed that the time

that suited most Home Guards best was one starting about 21.00 hours on a Saturday evening and ending an hour or two after daylight on Sunday. Every Sunday, or sometimes commencing on Saturday night, an exercise was designed, always to illustrate some action that was open to an enemy to take. At first these exercises were chiefly valuable to give practice to Officers and N.C.O.'s in handling their Units, and practice to all ranks in knowledge of the country, moving on an unseen object without being seen, taking advantage of cover and avoiding skylines, but mostly, perhaps, to give confidence to all concerned.

The exercises became more specific. Each defended locality was attacked in turn, the attackers being drawn from other units in the Battalion. Larger scale exercises were held to test the possibilities of holding Dundry Ridge both by day and night. Many attacks were made on Portishead to test the defences of that place. So that, in 1942, we had acquired some skill in field work, but little in weapons, due to the lack of practice ammunition.

Early in 1943, No. 9 Company had worked up a Demonstration Platoon which, by giving a demonstration of the attack on a wood, using live ammunition, was of considerable value to the whole Battalion. Nos. 2 and 4 Companies gave very good and ambitious exhibitions of the handling of a Platoon and the use of Home Guard weapons.

In the summer of 1943 we held a competition for the best Platoon in the Battalion, points being given for the appreciation of the task given to the Platoon Commander by the Umpire on the ground, for the way in which he imparted his knowledge and proposals to his unit, and finally for the way the Platoon reacted and the manner in which the operation was carried out. We were most fortunate in finding Col. Grylls, D.S.O.—who had lately retired and had been carrying out Umpire's work in exercises of regular troops—to both set the tasks and umpire the results.

The tests were carried out at North Widcombe and Cameley and proved both highly instructive and most valuable training. The Platoons, which had each one gone through an eliminating competition in their own Companies, showed a high standard in field work and were much commended by the Umpire, No. 9 (Leigh Woods) Company proving the winners. Part of the test of the

Platoon Competition for the Battalion Commander's Cup was to fire, immediately on completion of what was a fairly severe physical effort, a fire test of the Platoon, which included a sniper's test, rifle, Sten and B.A.R. group. The shooting was generally poor: not surprising, as the only chance of practice had been with the very worn out ·303 rifles borrowed from a Pioneer Company.

About this time, however, ammunition began to come into better supply and the ban was lifted on using ·300 rifles for practice firing. Immediately steps were taken to ensure that everyone had some practice and that some idea of what we could hit, and at what range, could be formed.

Capt. Thistlewaite was appointed as Weapons Training Officer for the Battalion, and each Company appointed a similar officer. This little band of Weapons Training Officers was most valuable and helped to put through in a very few months a veritable orgy of rifle practice, and with the very willing backing of the Company officers, the results were most satisfactory and surprising as regards the improvement in the general standard of shooting.

Capt. Thistlewaite also organised—rather on the lines of the Demonstration Platoon of No. 9 Company, only embracing all weapons—Demonstration Squads consisting of men armed with rifles and Sten guns, and crews of each of the different patterns of machine-guns supplied : the Northover, the Anti-tank gun and the Bombard. For each of these weapons special crews were trained and came into action, demonstrating the use of the weapon and how it should be handled. The Bombard crews made a considerable impression ; they could dismount the Bombard from a trailer, mount it in the position selected and fire the first round in well under two minutes, and they could hit the target five times out of six with the first round. The Weapons Training Demonstration Group visited each Company in turn and were good value.

We were badly off for rifle ranges. This did not matter very much in early days as ammunition for practice scarcely existed, but I had early impressed on Company Commanders the importance and convenience of having their own ranges if suitable ground could be found. No. 8 Company, Bishopsworth, was the pioneer in Company Ranges, and entirely by their own efforts constructed a very useful range. Every Company eventually had its own range,

but due to situation some were much better than others. The best was undoubtedly that at North Widcombe, constructed by No. 7 (Chew Magna) Company. This was due not only to the natural surroundings, which were in their way ideal for the purpose, but very much due to the unbounded energy and enterprise of the Platoon most involved, led by Capt. A. Tyte, later Second-in-Command of the Company. They had much digging and many setbacks, due to frost and flooding, and more than once had to start again, but the final result did the greatest credit to all concerned, and the whole Battalion has benefited and had many pleasant days on the range, which was also entirely suited to field exercises.

Here, too, the Demonstration Party gave an exhibition of night firing ; a very good demonstration twice repeated, and each time raising the heart-beats of the Battalion Commander by just a trifle, perhaps, for it was difficult to be quite certain that there were no courting couples in the hills beyond the targets. The story goes that one Home Guard, in spite of warning, the better to see the show, went up on the hills and was quite surprised when the tracers began to leap about all round him. "I thought I'd better come down along out of that" was all he remarked.

At North Widcombe in the summer of 1944 we held many pleasant rifle meetings, not always blessed by the weather. We held an Officers' Meeting open to all officers in the Battalion on the basis of 1/– in the pool, and pools were fired with rifle, Sten gun and revolver, while at the same time we had a ·22 pool for Home Guard ladies, which proved tremendously popular.

A similar meeting was held for N.C.O.'s of the Battalion, with a preliminary day for all ranks on three different ranges, and a shoot-off of ties on the second day. This time, besides the ladies, we had a Cadet Competition with teams from the different Cadet Units affiliated to the Battalion.

In closing a chapter on training, I believe I should be voicing the opinion of every member of the Battalion when I say that our Sunday exercises were of very great interest and incidentally provided us with many a good outing in a countryside many of us would otherwise never have seen except from the road. On the whole we were extremely fortunate with weather, both for our exercises and in our week-end camps, for which we had a choice of almost ideal

localities. Of these camps, all affording excellent opportunities for training, possibly the one held in Brockley Woods for the visit of the Home Guard Travelling Wing, was of the greatest value, and we are much indebted to Captain Dalziel for the knowledge he and his staff imparted to us. The idea of Travelling Wings for training the Home Guard was a most excellent one and we all wished we could see more of them.

As part of the scheme of training it was desirable to hold occasional Parades at which the whole Battalion was represented. If it had not been for the expense of transport and the difficulty of providing it, I should have liked to have had a Battalion Parade of some sort every six months. They served to promote and stimulate rivalry between Companies, and also bring home the fact, especially to the more remote Platoons, that they were part of a much larger organisation.

The first Battalion Parade was held at Leigh Woods in May, 1941, and we were lucky to get that great soldier, Field Marshal Lord Birdwood, to come and take the salute. The Parade was the first occasion on which the various Companies had ever seen each other as a whole, and the results—including a march past the Field Marshal —were very creditable, and marked the point when we were all in uniform and a properly-organised body.

The second Battalion Parade was held at Clevedon in May, 1943, to mark the third anniversary of the life of the Home Guard, and also, from the Battalion Commander's point of view, to note the general progress in drill and movement : a good guide to fighting value. Just over eighteen hundred officers and men were on parade.

Finally, on 3rd December, a Parade was held in Ashton Park following a Parade March through Long Ashton village, to mark the end of the useful life of the Home Guard—a day not without regrets for most of us, for if our training through the four and a half years of our existence had been hard, it had not been without considerable interest, and it had brought together all manner of men in a common cause.

In this final Parade there were 1,250 men present, and a representative number of the women who had given such valuable help to the Battalion and Companies.

CHAPTER VIII

Operational

FROM an operational point of view, the 7th Somerset or Long Ashton Battalion of the Home Guard would have been better named "The North Somerset Battalion." Long Ashton was, however, the name of the Police Division, and it was on the Police Divisions the country was divided up.

We did, in fact, form the northern boundary to the County of Somerset, with Gloucester and Bristol City to the north and north-east, and the Bristol Channel to the north-west and west. Neither I, nor probably anyone else, had ever studied the area from the point of view of invasion, or not at least since the time of Napoleon, when movement was definitely more deliberate.

I had myself driven from my house to the south coast, leaving after breakfast, had a bathe and lunch on the beach near Lyme Regis, and back in time for tea : a matter of no more than fifty miles each way, or an easy days run for a mechanised Army served by first-class roads and plenty of them.

I had, before the War, been Chairman of Youth Organisations for Gloucester and Somerset and this had put me in touch with village and small town organisations—Cyclists' Touring Clubs, Playing Fields Associations, etc.—and meant visits to such and similar Associations all over the county. This, with some following of fox-hounds and beagles, gave me knowledge of the area for which I was to be responsible.

Time was the great factor. If the Germans were to invade at all it seemed certain they would come as soon as possible after the disaster of Dunkirk : they must have known of the vast stores of equipment left behind in France ; they must have known of the condition of things in England. Why didn't they come ? I certainly don't know the answer, but I think it may well be that the German Military Machine has studied movement on land down to the last button in reserve, but putting men in ships and boats and the

organisation for landing in enemy territory was something never covered by the great General Staff. That it is an undertaking of tremendous difficulty we in this country know well enough.

A look at the map showed that the targets affecting this Battalion were Bristol, with Avonmouth and Portishead, and we were the Guardians of the southern approaches to both Bristol and Portishead. Into Bristol from the south coast ran two main roads : the road coming up through Shepton Mallet which joins with the road from Wells, and the Bridgwater road from Taunton ; and from the west comes the direct road from Weston-super-Mare, joined by the road from Clevedon at Cambridge Batch and fed by various roads coming up from the south. Besides these main roads, all meeting in Bristol, there was the road from Bath and a very important road leading directly from the Mendip Hills, through Chew Stoke, over Dundry Hill and into Bristol *via* Bishopsworth.

Dundry Hill was the main feature in the district, and an enemy mounting guns on this hill had Bristol at his mercy, the top of Dundry giving a complete view over the whole City of Bristol. Portishead was also an obvious target, not only from its own value as containing the Power Station from which the power and light for Avonmouth Docks was derived, but it had also valuable Docks of its own, a Wireless Station and a Coast Defence Battery. The high ground overlooking the docks in Portishead would also provide satisfactory sites for guns and mortars shelling both Bristol and Avonmouth.

An enemy attack by sea-borne troops appeared much more likely from the south coast than the west. The sea crossing to the south coast was much shorter, and possible landing places in the Bristol Channel were well guarded by nature in the shape of strong tides and mud-banks. It seemed, too, that any sea-borne attempt would be strongly backed by an air-borne landing. All we could attempt was to slow down advance by the roads, and select suitable places for all-round defence to strike against an air-borne landing.

The country was admirably suited for ambush, but suitable weapons to cover an ambush were sadly lacking. At first we had rifles, shot-guns and home-made Molitoff Cocktails, later strengthened by the Northover Projector, the Blacker Bombard, and by hand grenades. Along each road these ambush strong points were

arranged in depth, usually in a natural cutting or steep winding road, the central feature being a wire, taken slantways across the road, when possible immediately following a sharp bend in the road. If the cutting ran through a wood, so much the better to conceal the bomb-thrower and covering riflemen. As an example, the Wells road was guarded at Rush Hill, just north of the junction of the Shepton Mallet and Wells roads ; at Chelwood Bridge, where the Bath road crosses both the Wells road and the railway to Frome ; and at Hursley Hill, which provided a natural feature for defence of the road and the railway where it passes round the east flank of the Dundry Ridge. Other roads were similarly treated by providing defence in depth on similar lines, while arrangements were made to block minor roads leading into the main roads at frequent intervals by felling suitable trees across each other, so that even if it should prove impossible to cover these minor blocks the enemy would take time in clearing a way through or finding a way round.

It was thought that the first place at which contact would be made with an enemy advancing from the south would most likely be Rush Hill, and here was concentrated most of No. 3 (Temple Cloud) Company in a very strong natural position and one which, with a suitable number of machine-guns to cover the flanks, might have held up even a strong column for some time. Chelwood Bridge was a very different type of position, important owing to the crossing of main roads and railway but difficult to defend with the type of weapons we possessed. With heavy machine-guns and mortars it was good, as an enemy coming from any direction must come into the open plain, offering a splendid field of fire for the defenders from low hills overlooking the crossing. We never had enough or suitable weapons for this position, but it remained obvious that it must be guarded as far as was possible. Later in 1943 we had three Bombards and two machine-guns available and the possibilities improved.

Further north, at Hursley Hill, again we had an admirable position, but lacked the right weapons. The position was the arc of a steep rise up which the road from the south wound on a very steep gradient, while the railway ran on a lower rise across the valley and more or less parallel to the defender's hill. Here we were strong in rifles but weak in machine-guns, while a few mortars

should have made it necessary for an approaching enemy to turn the position, entailing a fairly wide movement in difficult country with the consequent delay which was all that we could reasonably hope for.

It would be tedious to describe the positions adopted on all other roads. The principle was the same and the strength of each position depended largely on the ingenuity and powers of improvisation of the local Commander.

While the blocking of the roads was one, perhaps our main, commitment, it was to be expected that any advance by road would be aided, and perhaps preceded, by air-borne troops of which in 1940 and 1941 Germany was expected to be well provided and whose success in Crete was an object lesson to the Home Guard. In order to meet this particular threat it was very necessary to insist on the importance of all-round defence in all the road block positions, and in all those other positions which may have been suited for the defence of a village or small town, or definitely as a defended locality at which scattered sections of Home Guard could muster, preparatory to assuming an anti-parachute role.

Dundry Ridge, as has been previously mentioned, was the key position in the whole Battalion Area: looking south gave a clear view to the Mendip Hills ; looking north overlooked Bristol City, Whitchurch Aerodrome, and beyond the City to Filton Aerodrome. German tactics had early emphasised the importance of aerodromes and, from our point of view, their defence. Whitchurch was the only one we had at first ; later we had Lulsgate.

The problem of Whitchurch was the problem of Bristol, and the problem of both was Dundry Ridge : anyone commanding that ridge had both City and Aerodrome in the bag. This fact always seemed obvious, but was never taken very seriously by the Bristol Garrison Commander, or at least it so appeared.

During the summer of 1940 a mobile column of Regular troops, with Bren carriers and mortars, carried out an exercise to demonstrate the value of the position. This exercise was watched by the Chief of the General Staff and by General Auchinlek, and the importance of denying this hill to the enemy was strongly emphasised. It was again and again pointed out that, owing to the scarcity of population in the vicinity of the ridge, and the peculiarities of the Home

Guard, it was not possible to move men far from their own local district. To move men forward to better defend their homes was not so difficult, but to move them back, leaving their own villages and families without defence, did not appeal to the Home Guard. The best we could do was to strengthen the small Platoon on Dundry by the Bishopsworth Company, and strengthen the eastern or Maes Knoll end by using part of No. 2 (Keynsham) Company, although in fact this Company had already a very large area to cover.

From a military point of view, it would no doubt have been correct to have withdrawn the whole of Nos. 2, 3 and 7 Companies to the southern slopes of the ridge, but this could not well be done under Home Guard organisation. A solution which appeared possible was to have manned the ridge with two or three of the Bristol Battalions. These should have had a good chance of denying the high ground to the enemy while, with an enemy in possession, their actually selected positions appeared quite useless. However, the Garrison Commander, although apparently agreeing, was very loath to let any Bristol Battalions come forward, preferring to retain them for street fighting, which seemed to me unlikely to occur should the enemy be free to shell the city at his will.

During 1941 Lulsgate Aerodrome began to take shape, and in 1942, 1943 and 1944 was perhaps the primary target for the enemy in the Battalion Area, as an aid to the destruction of Bristol. During the time it was building, and when in full use, its defence varied from nil to a fairly strong force of the R.A.F. Regiment over a very short period. In a considered attack on Avonmouth or Filton Aerodrome it seemed likely the enemy would use Lulsgate as a landing ground for troop carriers and gliders to build up a reserve.

The Aerodrome was on the boundary line of Nos. 7 and 8 Battalions, but it so happened that we had more Home Guards within reasonable distance. The Aerodrome in enemy hands would affect the whole area and especially the approaches to Bristol. No. 6 (Yatton) Company was most affected, and as the situation changed overseas so the likelihood of sea- or air-borne attack fluctuated, and this Company had to assume the two roles : its normal role in defending the approach to Bristol by the road from Weston-super-Mare, and the defence of the Aerodrome. There

was not man-power for both at once ; but as time went on and the possibility of sea-borne invasion faded, and only the threat of air-borne raids remained, aerodromes became definitely of first importance.

No. 1 (Long Ashton) Company was also affected, as they held a post on Felton Common, on the east side of the Aerodrome. The Aerodrome was surrounded by rough wooded and rocky country, admirably adapted to the guerrilla tactics of the Home Guard, and interesting exercises were designed with the view of constantly reinforcing the units engaged in order to surround the Aerodrome and prevent its capture by air-borne troops or, if captured, the subsequent exit of the enemy troops. During 1944 we were involved in a somewhat similar problem, due to the very large concentration of vehicles in certain localities ready for movement overseas. One of these, occupying many miles of the isolated roads on top of the Mendip Hills, provided a special problem, as it was considered not unreasonable to expect that the enemy had photographed this camp and would consider it a worth-while target for parachute troops. There is no doubt an enterprising enemy could, with a small parachute force, have done a very considerable amount of damage before the nearest Home Guard force could have got to the Vehicle Park, such an operation taking approximately one hour.

We had by this time produced a certain amount of mobility, and by drill had produced Bombard teams which could dismount from the trailer and get into action—that is, the first round fired —in well under two minutes. With the position previously known and distance from cross roads, etc., carefully marked, these weapons might have been extremely useful—and disconcerting to the enemy.

In addition to the general defence of the southern approaches to Bristol, we had two garrison localities : Clevedon and Portishead.

Clevedon was of no military importance, and any direct attack on it by an enemy advancing on Bristol or Portishead would come probably from a foraging party looking for food, transport and petrol, it might well have been necessary to carry out a scorched-earth policy in Clevedon and destroy anything that could be of use to the enemy.

The Home Guard Company at Clevedon formed a useful reserve to worry the flank of a force marching on Bristol, or to go to the

assistance of Portishead. From Clevedon to Bristol there runs a well-wooded ridge, and although in recent years this country has been considerably cut up into plots for building, there still remains a great deal of country from which an enterprising guerrilla leader could work. The orders for the Home Guard in Clevedon were to avoid being shut up and destroyed in the town, but if faced with a strong force to make their Headquarters in the hills from which to continue operations. With this end in view, a good many exercises were devised to introduce the men of Clevedon to what was, I fancy, to most of them a *terra incognita*, the normal trend being to look to the more artificial attraction laid out by a benevolent Urban Council on the shores of the Bristol Channel, rather than explore the hinterland.

Portishead was a different proposition. Here were important Docks ; also a Power Station which both generated and distributed power for the whole of North Somerset and for the very important Docks in Avonmouth. There was a Wireless Station of considerable importance and a Coast Defence Battery mounting the somewhat obsolete 6-in. guns on out-of-date mountings. Moreover, the hills round about Portishead overlooked Avonmouth and the shipping in the Docks, and commanded the approach and entrance to the Avon and the Bristol Docks.

The position was almost ideal for defence from the land side, being guarded by extensive flat lands intersected with wide rhines with very soft bottoms forming ideal tank traps and forcing all wheeled traffic to three or four crossings. But our numbers were limited, and the right type of weapon for covering those crossings almost non-existent. Much thought and many exercises were held in order to solve the problem of how to make the best use of what men and material we had.

The Company had the advantage, in the early days, of the ripe experience of Colonel Eberle, D.S.O., as Company Commander, and when he had to give up were lucky to find Major Williams, M.C., under whose energetic handling a very high degree of efficiency in training was reached. The Company had other officers and men with much enthusiasm and real knowledge of their country, and it was found that attacks by regular troops without knowledge of the country were easily foiled, while even local Home Guards acting

as enemy found it almost impossible to cross the marshes without being observed and met in strength as they reached the foothills. Then the Company received blows from which they might well have never recovered. Major Williams had to give up owing to a business transfer, and simultaneously we were ordered to detail eighty men out of the Company to man the Coast Defence Battery.

This was a heavy blow and the strongest protests were made, for not only were the numbers remaining quite inadequate for the defence against attack, but it was crushing for morale. The higher authorities must now have considered the danger of invasion, either by sea- or air-borne troops very slight, for it was obvious to everyone that the chances of the Coast Defence Battery being employed were just nil, entailing as it would a trip round Land's End and braving the minefields in the Bristol Channel. It was held, however, that some suicidally inclined submarine or E boat might make a raid with a view to blowing up the lock-gates in Avonmouth or Portishead, in which case we definitely had the wrong type of gun to deal with such an eventuality. Finally, I was told the Admiralty always wanted these guns kept manned ; as they didn't have to man them, of course they would. However, in spite of these depressing factors, under Major Gove and his still indefatigable Platoon Commanders the Portishead Company again recruited up to full numbers and maintained its very high standard : a standard in which the Signal Section under Lieut. Parsons merits a special word of praise.

The trouble with the Coast Battery at Portishead was repeated in 1943 and the spring of 1944 when the necessity to man the anti-aircraft guns by Home Guard was ordered. The importance of the manning of these guns was not a matter of contention ; the method adopted, by which the guts of a company was pulled out, leaving the rest to get on as best they could with the knowledge they were now quite inadequate to carry out their field commitments, meant that the authorities now took the view that such commitments were of no further importance, in which case those not required for A.A. might well have been disbanded. As it was, it meant an extremely unsatisfactory and quite unnecessary reshuffle, and it speaks well for the discipline of the Home Guard that it stood up so well to what might mildly be called the tactless methods of carrying out a desired object.

In concluding a chapter on the operational role of the Battalion it might be well to remark that there was a tendency, one may suppose throughout the Home Guard, to consider each Battalion, and indeed each Company and Platoon, as holding an isolated area with the perimeter as a front line. Actually, of course, we were simply following the principle based on the Prime Minister's declaration that we would fight them on the beaches, in the villages, in the fields, the woods, and the towns—in fact wherever we could meet them. We had Battalions between us and the sea and again behind ; when we were over-run, we had more Battalions waiting all the way to John o' Groats. Each defended locality, strong point, road block, or whatever it was, we had orders to hold to the last cartridge, possibly typifying heroic measures, but the last cartridge was only the tenth cartridge, or one or two minutes action, and no reserve. Moreover, there was for two years no practice ammunition, and many a Home Guard would have fired his rifle for the first time in action. It was perhaps a knowledge of this fact that induced the authorities to issue pikes and cudgels ; and these, for the survivors after they had been over-run and their ammunition was gone, might have been welcome enough. The mistake made was that some authorities endeavoured to make out that in modern war it was better to have a pike or a cudgel than a rifle or automatic weapon—which could hardly be expected to impress anybody.

Even Haw Haw was a little suspicious of such statements and began to think that it must all be part of a colossal bluff; and perhaps it was—and it came off. Of the war that would have gone on after our modest allowance of ammunition was gone, for the survivors there were ways and means of continuing the fight, as was exemplified by the men of the Maquis in France and Yugoslavia. It might well be that all male survivors would have been forced back into the Scottish hills, there to wait for help in the shape of arms and food from the Dominions and the Americas. The Navy and the Air Force would have taken very heavy toll, not only of troops in the first assault, but of any and every attempt to send over reinforcements. It was in the two years after Dunkirk, when the Navy and the Air Force had been so hard hit and while the Army was either fully committed overseas or in a state of training at home, that the Home Guard was so all-important. Hitler relieved the strain by attacking Russia, but

the position was again tense in the autumn of 1942, which brought the first major victories, El Alamein and Stalingrad : far apart and utterly different, and yet both bearing directly on the importance of the Home Guard.

Guards and Patrols

Perhaps the most irksome duty of the Home Guard was the supply of night guards at what was known as Vulnerable Points or V.P.'s. These duties fell more heavily on some Companies than others.

When it became no longer necessary to man O.P.'s nightly, certain Companies were relieved of all night duty, except for the telephone guard at Company H.Q. But in other Companies, particularly No. 4 (Portishead) Company, the duty remained heavy throughout the War.

At Portishead, a guard had to be supplied at the Power Station, the Docks and the Wireless Station, and as this Company was also drawn on to supply eighty men to man the Coast Battery, their standing duties were really heavy, and the Company and Platoon Commanders were only saved from an almost impossible task by the goodwill and readiness to do any duty considered necessary.

No. 1 Company at first, and later No. 8 Company, had a long experience of guarding the filter-beds and pumping station at the reservoir at Barrow. This was the main water-supply for Bristol, and the safeguard was necessary in case the enemy had proved more enterprising than they in fact did. Patrols too, in the early years of the War, afforded a good deal of night work.

There was a patrol on the Mendip Ridge from the Castle of Comfort to Charter House. The locality afforded good landing ground and was very isolated. To keep it under observation it was necessary to transport men from the Harptrees, and this meant transport every evening and morning : transport that was voluntarily supplied either by the Home Guard themselves or by good friends in the neighbourhood.

Patrols on the coast were never pleasant in winter weather, and No. 4 Company came in again here, to guard a particularly dreary bit of coast between the mouth of the Avon and Portishead Docks,

and a well-bombed stretch to the west of Portishead where shipping collected for examination.

Nos. 5 and 6 Companies also came in for the Coastal Patrols on a stretch of coast inhabited mostly by wild ducks, and very nearly inaccessible, due to extensive mud-flats, but a not unattractive country for solitary gentlemen to get ashore bent on the dangerous game of espionage.

Lastly our Mounted Patrols were, or would have been, most useful ; as it was, they made good each night the long, and in those days solitary, road between Ashton Park and Tickenham. Later this road was very well covered by American troops camped on each side of it. The Mounted Patrol also supplied a patrol during the night from Barrow Court to Backwell Common : another stretch of country difficult to cover and watch except by patrols, and mounted patrols if available.

Our Mounted Patrol was some fifty strong, and very keen, but too expensive to maintain for long—and the authorities were not prepared to help. In the spring of 1941, when it became apparent that whatever might happen in the way of invasion of this country might not be for many months, the Mounted Platoon which had been formed under Mr. Smith of Cambridge Batch, and continued for a time under Mr. Thompson, was disbanded, many of its members joining up with their local Platoons.

As a last effort we were asked to guard all the railway bridges for a period both before and after D-day. This duty fell on Nos. 1 and 6 Companies, and lasted for about six weeks—until it was clear that the counter-attack so many expected on this country was not to be staged.

Finally, it should be recorded that the Home Guard were called upon and rendered much help to the Civil Authorities during the somewhat hectic nights in 1940, 1941 and 1942. The whole Battalion Area received its share of bombs ; but damage was, of course, much more extensive in the more crowded area adjacent to Bristol, and Nos. 1, 2 and 8 Companies had the most frequent calls. The attacks on Bristol were heavy and often prolonged, and were always a source of anxiety to the Home Guard, as it seems certain then that sooner or later one of these attacks would be the overture for air-borne landings on a big scale.

OPERATIONAL

A list of those killed or wounded on duty, and those commended for special services, will be found in the appendix, and it should be remarked here, that while those who hold Certificates for special commendation richly deserve their awards, there are very many more that could be equally well recommended, but the awards are necessarily strictly limited.

The 7th September, 1940, stands out as a memorable day, a day on which the Alarm went out and the order was given for the Home Guard to muster at Action Stations, and in some cases the church bells were rung : the agreed signal to call out the Home Guard. The response in the Battalion was all that was expected and in approximately two hours everyone were at their stations and ready, ready as we could be in those days, but lamentably short of weapons, and especially ammunition.

It is perhaps worth recording that the order came by telephone from the Area Commander himself, his headquarters being then at Bridgwater. I personally answered the telephone to receive an enquiry from Colonel Alms : " Is that the Battalion Commander ? " and when I replied in the affirmative, he gave the order " Action Stations." I made some further remark as to how long we should be out, thinking of a test exercise, to which he replied : " The real thing ; they are coming."

CHAPTER IX

Observations of a Platoon Commander

'X' PLATOON of our Company was to be our Mobile Platoon. The men were largely picked at random, for few of us, although neighbours for years past, really knew each other. The links that bound us were a keen desire to do our bit and the fact that we should be defending our own and each others homes.

Quickly a pride in 'X' Platoon grew and increased. This feeling urged N.C.O.'s and men to undertake the most arduous training, with one object in view : to beat the enemy on our own ground however well armed he might be.

From the Platoon a picked squad was drawn, twenty-five strong, and this squad later performed considerable feats of endurance in their endeavour to get fit and ready for whatever might come along. At the first parade it was emphasised that discipline was essential, and that we expected a higher degree of discipline than that of the Regular Army, because it was self imposed.

The enemy had already proclaimed that the L.D.V. were to be treated as "franc tireurs," so that no question of surrender need ever enter their minds. To judge from the Germans' conduct in other countries, they would be shot in any case, so it was no case of heroics, but a choice of being shot without resistance, or making a fight for it. To do this effectively, first-class discipline must be maintained ; if any member of the Platoon did not conform, out he went ; clumsiness and ignorance of soldiering were expected and could be easily remedied, but insubordination in any form would not be tolerated, and on that basis we would commence training.

From that day till the end, for the Home Guard, of the War, there was never any trouble about discipline. The ages of the men in the Platoon ranged from fifty-seven to thirty-one, and their occupations : clerks, factory workers, manual workers, and agriculturalists. There was a sprinkling of poachers, who knew

little of fieldcraft as a science, but who had practised it unconsciously all their lives. These proved of particular value later on, when fieldcraft training by day and by night were undertaken.

During prolonged training it was surprising to find that the older men (45-52) were tougher and harder than the men in their twenties who joined us later on. Younger men were called up for service with the Forces, some were transferred to industry ; so that there was a continual leakage of trained and semi-trained men. Against this was a trickle of new recruits who had to be trained from the beginning : a particularly disheartening business and hard for the instructors. The advent of directed men in August, 1942, caused misgiving, and the idea of such men serving in 'X' Platoon was not welcomed. We acquired some sixteen of these directed men in the Platoon, and their training received very serious consideration by both Officers and N.C.O's. Our fears proved to be groundless as, with few exceptions, the conscripts turned out to be conscientious men, and some were superlatively good and later joined the special "Night Squad."

To begin with, it was decided that the directed men should be kept apart and be trained for two and a half hours per night, three nights a week for six weeks, before being allowed to join the Platoon. The extra hours were, of course, hard on Instructors who already had the two nights for ordinary Platoon Parades. The first parade of directed men secured a full attendance. They were told that they had joined two and a half years late : that no doubt they all had perfectly good reasons, in that we were not interested, but their future interested us intensely ; that eventually they were to join the finest Platoon in the whole Home Guard, but not till they were fit ; that they were going to work very hard for six weeks and it would no doubt hurt, but their Instructors would never ask them to do anything they could not do themselves. After two weeks progress was so marked, and they were so obviously trying, that they were complimented and the time of the session slightly reduced.

During the first years there were frequent air attacks, and many of the N.C.O.'s and men turned out night after night to help the Civil Defence, and also very much in the hopes of getting the crew of any machine shot down. 'X' Platoon had very definite ideas

regarding how such crews should be dealt with ; but they had no luck—the nearest machine fell some miles away.

In 1941, the Thompson sub-machine-gun was introduced and not received too enthusiastically by the old hands who clung to their rifles as a soldier's best friend, but as training advanced, and it began to be understood that the Tommy gun or the Sten gun was, in fact, a long and very effective bayonet, a different view was taken. Emphasis had always been laid on close-range fighting, every bullet to kill. Fifty yards was better than one hundred yards, and twenty-five better still. Four years later a Commando N.C.O. returning from France after D-day, paid us a visit and told how the unsuspecting German was allowed to approach to within seven yards before opening fire, with the result that two hundred and fifty dead Germans were left in a four-acre field. We felt that we had the right idea.

In the spring and summer of 1942 there were a number of excellent Courses of Instruction available to Officers and N.C.O's. Some were short week-end visiting Courses—or Travelling Wings, as they were called. There were courses of a week's duration at several Army Schools. The spirit at all these schools was excellent, the Instruction first class, Instructors and Students all one hundred per cent. keen.

Early in 1941, night training started in earnest; this commenced with night cross-country movement on a compass course. The first lesson learnt was that a squad of ten or twelve men could only manage one mile an hour if the movement was properly and silently done, keeping touch and control. We found how unfamiliar our own country could be in the dark, away from roads and especially in fog and mist, and we were pleased to think of what the enemy would make of it if he tried to move off the roads.

The men of the night squad learnt how to handle high explosives, lay booby traps, and so on. It became a regular thing to take part, with special troops, on their night attacks, which often took them far afield into other counties. On these trips men wore denim overalls, blacked their faces, wore jersey caps and carried no rifles. The job was to lay explosives and get out again undetected.

We were always successful in getting into Aerodromes, however well defended, marking the aircraft with chalk to signify bombs placed. We were amazed to find how easy it is to crawl through

Dannert wire ; the grass grows long inside the coils and provides perfect cover, and provided time is taken, there is little difficulty about crawling through even in bright moonlight.

The night squad became very keen on this kind of training, pitting their wits and training against other units : and they became very good at it. On one occasion it was a matter of dispute, some days later, whether we had in fact penetrated a certain strong point. We were able to hand the Commanding Officer a knife and sheath taken from the Sergeant in command of the strong point by stalking him in the dark, leaving him ignorant of his loss.

An example of week-end training was an operation to attack a village guarding an Aerodrome in a neighbouring county. Saturday afternoon : ordinary Platoon Parade, dismiss 17.00 hours ; on parade again 22.00 hours (it was a wet night and meant three and a half hours across country in pitch darkness) ; returned to H.Q. at 07.45 Sunday ; 09.30 on Parade for a camouflage display. In the course of the night attack six men had been gassed and were violently sick, one having to be left behind in hospital. The squad had been on the move from 14.30 on Saturday till noon on Sunday, with a short break. Many similar week-ends were spent in training, always, wet or fine, under the strictest field conditions.

Our last exercise on the bigger scale was to take part with some 2,000 Regular troops in the attack on a town in mid Somerset, the local Home Guard defending. We got into the town and lay up undetected. We then had to find our way out again and report to the H.Q. of the Highland Light Infantry in a Sector previously indicated.

The night squad led the way through gardens and lanes, past C.D. and Police, and eventually we rolled, one at a time, across the main road and into a cemetery. We then got into some kale which was very wet, crossed several railway tracks, passed through the yard of a big factory, and after some trouble located the H.Q. in a farm. It was then about 03.00. At 05.30 hours the attack was to go in. We had to pass again through the defences and lay a smoke screen near some ponds which were indicated.

We had no difficulty in getting into the town again, and promptly at 05.30 we fired a green light : the pre-arranged signal. We lighted our smoke-candles unobserved, and our job was finished.

These smoke-candles were No. 20 and contained gas, and we suffered from this and were glad to get out of it. At 06.30 we left the town full of smoke and gas, and the civil population must have taken a dim view of the proceedings.

'X' Platoon's work is done. That work was spontaneous and hard. This is only a very abbreviated account of the work of one Platoon among perhaps 50,000, all imbued with the same spirit. There has been no fighting for the Home Guard, but a great mutual respect has arisen among its members, and no time spent in such a cause could be time wasted.

CHAPTER X

Conclusion

THIS record of the life and activities of the 7th Somerset Battalion of the Home Guard was written as possibly of interest to all those who served in the Battalion. It is repetition to say how much I am indebted to the loyal co-operation of one and all who served with me, to the Company and Platoon Commanders who bore the brunt of the work, and to my own H.Q. Staff.

Major Jesser Coope I have already mentioned. We were fortunate in securing the services of Major Wallace to take his place; always his counsel was of the greatest value, and although by the nature of his own work he had often to be away, he kept touch with the work of the Battalion, managed to appear and take a useful part on most Sundays, and I knew he would always be there somehow to the sound of the guns.

Major Harrison was a tower of strength ; never missed an exercise and helped in innumerable ways to ensure smooth running.

Capt. Bennett took over the task of Battalion Intelligence Officer, and to him and all the Company Intelligence Officers our thanks are due.

To Mrs. Shore—who stepped into the work of Administrative Assistant to the Battalion, without the pay—the whole Battalion is indebted, and especially the Battalion Commander. It was she who threaded her way through the intricacies of subsistence allowance, transport, training, and Battalion funds. I am, in fact, expecting a note from the Chancellor of the Exchequer enquiring when she will be ready to take over one of the many social security schemes, or possibly all of them.

Capt. Lister relieved Capt. Hardwicke as Battalion Adjutant in June, 1942, and was most valuable in furthering the training work in progress, especially in assisting to umpire the many eliminating contests between Platoons. His readiness to assist both in field work and on the range was much appreciated by Company Commanders.

I have already spoken of the services of Capt. Latimer and his able staff, and it only remains to say a word about those officers who perhaps did the most difficult work and the least spectacular : the Battalion and Company Quartermasters. In the Battalion it was two years before we had a Quartermaster, but we were allowed an Administrative Assistant, who came during the summer of 1940 and lasted approximately six months, without any marked success. It was not until I secured the services of Lieut. Hodges from the Portishead Company that, bringing his business ability and experience to bear, we got on top of the job, so to speak. Lieut. Hodges was eventually called up and replaced, in March, 1943, by Capt. Curtis, who has maintained a high standard and developed a keen eye for unwarranted surpluses, occasionally to the annoyance of Company Commanders.

Finally, we are grateful to all those ladies who have helped us so loyally both at H.Q. and in the Companies. I am afraid their only reward is that of work well done. Truly the women's service in the Home Guard has been the Cinderella of the women's services. Perhaps if they ponder on the story of Cinderella they, too, may glean some satisfaction.

The Home Guard—like its predecessors, the Trained Band of Elizabeth's day and the Fencibles of the days of Napoleon—has not been called into action. My own feeling, for much the same reason that we eventually landed in Normandy, was that the enemy, if he came, would land on the beaches in the neighbourhood of Lyme Regis and endeavour to build up a defence line across to Burnham-on-Sea, and so rest his flanks on the sea, while, as we did for Cherbourg and Brest, so he would swing left to secure Plymouth and Falmouth before staging a main advance to the eastward. The distance of his first line would have only been thirty-five miles, and there was all too little to stop him. The Navy and the Air Force, while bringing off a triumph at Dunkirk and in the Battle of Britain, had been hit hard ; but it is doubtful if they would have allowed him to build up his reserves, and that is likely enough what he had himself thought ; and yet, had Germany, a military nation steeped in the fundamentals of war, kept to her main purpose, the defeat of the armed forces in this island on which all else depended, instead of using up her air strength in the fruitless bombing of London and

other targets which, while serving the plaudits of the Herrenvolk, made little real difference to the chances of ultimate victory, and had Germany concentrated all her forces to effect the landing of even fifty thousand men and in so doing lost one hundred thousand, what a prize lay open to her, and what a time we Home Guards would have had.

It didn't happen that way, and we can only join our historical predecessors with thanks to Providence that once more the threat of invasion has passed away and remained no more than a threat, albeit the most serious this country has ever faced.

APPENDIX

7TH SOMERSET BATTN. HOME GUARD

Killed by Enemy Action While on Duty

Pte. Gilbert Lovell	.. ..	No. 1 Company

Killed by Enemy Action

Sgt. Leslie Tripp	.. ..	No. 4 Company

Wounded by Enemy Action

Pte. Arthur Edward Norris	..	No. 2 Company
L/Cpl. Alfred Edwin Feltham	..	No. 2 Company
Pte. Donald Stanley Harris	..	No. 7 Company (while on duty)
Cpl. Frederick Oliver Gibson	..	No. 9 Company

COMMENDED FOR SERVICES RENDERED IN CONNECTION WITH ENEMY ACTION

Pte. Roland E. French	.. ..	No. 1 Company
Pte. Raymond D. Heard	.. ..	No. 1 Company
Capt. Frederick Arthur Venn	..	No. 2 Company
Section Commander Hugh William Stevenson Bradwell	..	No. 2 Company
Pte. Joseph Joshua Smart	.. ..	No. 2 Company
Pte. William Alan Hembrow	..	No. 2 Company
Cpl. Edward Alfred Mountain	..	No. 2 Company
Pte. Donald Reakes	.. ..	No. 2 Company

APPENDIX

AWARDS FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE AND CERTIFICATES AWARDED FOR GOOD SERVICE

M.B.E. (MILITARY DIVISION)

Capt. J. L. S. Melville	..	No. 3 Company

B.E.M. (MILITARY DIVISION)

Pte. F. W. Tennant	..	No. 2 Company

CERTIFICATES

C.S.M. Reginald Crease ..	..	No. 1 Company (later No. 8 Company)
Sgt. Norman Walter Tovey	..	No. 2 Company
Sgt. William Mitchell Bond	..	No. 2 Company
Sgt. Sidney Thomas Mills ..	..	No. 2 Company
L/Cpl. Leonard Arthur Didlick	..	No. 4 Company
Sgt. Thomas Alexander Carey	..	No. 7 Company
Pte. Arthur Edwin Whatley	..	No. 8 Company
Sgt. William Eric Dimes ..	..	No. 9 Company

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED ON BATTALION H.Q. STAFF

BATTALION COMMANDER

Lieut.-Col. Sir H. J. Tweedie, K.C.B., D.L., Legion of Honour

SECONDS IN COMMAND

Major J. C. Jesser-Coope — Major T. Wallace, M.C.

STAFF OFFICERS

Major C. T. Hudson Harrison, M.C.	Chief Staff Officer
Major N. H. Kettlewell	Medical Officer
Capt. J. S. Bennett	Intelligence Officer
Capt. W. Latimer	Signals Officer
Capt. J. Thistlewaite	Weapons Training and Gas Officer
Lieut. H. C. Boyes	A/Intelligence Officer
Lieut. E. R. Cockbaine	Transport Officer
Lieut. H. C. Crowlie, D.C.M., M.M.	A/Signals Officer
Lieut. J. E. Gray	A/Signals Officer
Lieut. H. N. Grundy	Ammunition Officer
Lieut. J. Hunt	A/Intelligence Officer
Lieut. H. W. Miles	Camouflage Officer
Lieut. K. S. Saunders	Ammunition Officer
Lieut. W. S. Whiting	Administrative Assistant
2nd-Lieut. F. R. C. Love	
2nd-Lieut. R. Stewart	

APPENDIX

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 1 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDERS

Major W. E. Berry
Major G. W. Stacey
Major T. Wallace, M.C.

SECONDS IN COMMAND

Capt. W. E. Berry
Capt. N. C. H. Glide
Capt. G. W. Stacey

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Capt. R. H. Elton
Capt. S. H. Knight
Capt. D. N. Robertson, M.C.
(Group of Platoons)
Lieut. G. C. Brooks
Lieut. F. S. G. Barnett, M.C.
Lieut. H. E. Croxall
Lieut. N. C. H. Glide
Lieut. A. Hirst
Lieut. G. H. Lewis
Lieut. H. S. Rex
Lieut. J. H. Savory
Lieut. A. W. Southway
2nd-Lieut. J. H. M. Budgett
2nd-Lieut. R. E. B. Harris
2nd-Lieut. R. J. Knight
2nd-Lieut. A. H. Mainstone
2nd-Lieut. J. MacGregor
J. W. F. Footman, O.C. Clifton College O.T.C.

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. W. J. Paramore, M.O.
Lieut. J. D. G. Baker
Lieut. H. C. Crowlie, D.C.M., M.M.
Lieut. R. W. Marsh
Lieut. G. T. Spinks
Lieut. J. L. R. Wood
2nd-Lieut. D. G. Ashford
2nd-Lieut. H. S. Crabtree
2nd-Lieut. D. T. Dufty
2nd-Lieut. N. Elliott
2nd-Lieut. J. A. Farrell
2nd-Lieut. W. S. Goodbody
2nd-Lieut. W. A. Jones
2nd-Lieut. R. W. M. Melvin
2nd-Lieut. A. G. Morgan
2nd-Lieut. F. Pembury
2nd-Lieut. G. C. Popham
2nd-Lieut. E. M. Savory
2nd-Lieut. J. G. R. Scarff
2nd-Lieut. A. E. Thorne, M.M.
2nd-Lieut. E. H. Wilkinson

7TH SOMERSET BATTN. HOME GUARD

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 2 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major W. S. Scammell, M.C.

SECONDS IN COMMAND

Capt. H. A. H. Fraser
Capt. F. W. Partington

OFFICERS COMMANDING GROUPS OF PLATOONS

Capt. G. E. A. Richards, M.C.
Capt. F. A. Venn

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Lieut. H. J. Bewley
Lieut. G. H. Blain
Lieut. W. H. Conn
Lieut. R. E. Cornick
Lieut. R. H. Gillard
Lieut. H. P. Gray
Lieut. P. Grossett, D.F.C.
Lieut. F. Harding, D.C.M.
Lieut. W. Morris
Lieut. H. E. Learoyd
Lieut. H. F. Palmer
Lieut. N. G. Sutton, M.C., Croix de Guerre
Lieut. C. W. Trussler
Lieut. F. A. Venn

OTHER OFFICERS

F. W. Tennant, B.E.M. (Major, retired)
Capt. N. D. Gerrish (M.O.)
Lieut. W. M. Bond
Lieut. L. J. C. Bunker
Lieut. A. Campbell-Smith
Lieut. G. F. Clark
Lieut. J. I. Derriman
Lieut. H. F. Dominey
Lieut. G. C. Fray
Lieut. C. K. Godwin
Lieut. G. E. James
Lieut. D. Kirkwood
Lieut. A. J. Membry
Lieut. A. G. C. Paget
Lieut. A. W. Powell
Lieut. A. Pym
Lieut. H. G. S. Thomas
2nd-Lieut. J. P. T. Briggs
2nd-Lieut. M. E. Brodie
2nd-Lieut. W. J. Frost
2nd-Lieut. C. J. Horlick
2nd-Lieut. G. Palmer
2nd-Lieut. F. C. Smailes
2nd-Lieut. G. M. Weir

APPENDIX

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 3 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDERS

Major A. D. Esheiby
Major H. A. H. Fraser

SECONDS IN COMMAND

Capt. J. L. S. Melville, M.B.E.
Lieut. F. D. Vaughan

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Lieut. J. W. Blanning
Lieut. P. A. Briscoe
Lieut. E. J. M. Fenton
Lieut. L. G. Pritchard
Lieut. A. B. Scott, M.C.
Lieut. H. C. Shearn, M.M.
Lieut. F. J. Terrell
Lieut. J. Thistlewaite
Lieut. W. S. S. Whiting

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. H. W. Kettlewell (Lieut.-Col., retired)
Capt. A. J. B. Miall (M.O.)
Lieut. F. C. Collyer
Lieut. J. Coxon
Lieut. E. W. Curtis
Lieut. D. J. Kathro
Lieut. S. W. D. Knight
Lieut. G. H. West
Lieut. B. L. Woodland
2nd-Lieut. W. E. Dobson
2nd-Lieut. L. Flower
2nd-Lieut. J. H. Murison
2nd-Lieut. F. E. Reeves

7TH SOMERSET BATTN. HOME GUARD

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 4 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDERS

Major G. S. J. F. Eberle, D.S.O., T.D.
Major F. H. Williams
Major J. H. Gove

SECOND IN COMMAND

Major G. S. J. F. Eberle, D.S.O., T.D.

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Capt. A. J. Organ
Lieut. R. Dickenson
Lieut. D. P. Farrant
Lieut. R. S. Gunson
Lieut. R. J. Hamilton
Lieut. F. L. Hodges
Lieut. H. G. Lock
Lieut. G. Mounter
Lieut. V. E. W. Nock
Lieut. H. C. Parsons
Lieut. W. C. Stuart-Low
Lieut. P. J. Stidard
2nd-Lieut. H. L. Cheston, M.M.
2nd-Lieut. B. J. A. Holder

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. J. E. McCornick (M.O.)
Lieut. L. A. Didlick
Lieut. J. L. Packard
Lieut. C. F. H. Walters
2nd-Lieut. H. S. Crabtree
2nd-Lieut. W. S. Jones

APPENDIX

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 5 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major G. de S. H. Middlemass

SECOND IN COMMAND

Capt. H. A. Lenanton, M.C.

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Lieut. C. A. Buxton
Lieut. G. R. Brodie
Lieut. J. L. Chaffe
Lieut. R. J. Hoddell
Lieut. A. W. Hand
Lieut. R. Latham, M.C.
Lieut. F. E. Reeves
Lieut. W. J. Simmons, M.M.
Lieut. L. H. Tiley

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. R. G. Turner, C.M.G., D.S.O. (Colonel, retired), M.O.
G. Christie
Lieut. R. D. Cousins
Lieut. E. Haines
Lieut. F. D. B. Morton
Lieut. T. Roynon
2nd-Lieut. P. R. Edwards
2nd-Lieut. J. McA. Hutton
2nd-Lieut. M. l'Anson
2nd-Lieut. G. C. Lucas
2nd-Lieut. A. G. Smith
2nd-Lieut. D. J. N. Sawkins

7TH SOMERSET BATTN. HOME GUARD

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 6 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major F. B. Leman

SECOND IN COMMAND

Capt. W. Twiston Davis, M.C.

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Capt. L. F. Adams
Capt. H. Drewett, M.C.
Lieut. T. R. Atlay
Lieut. P. G. Cardew
Lieut. J. A. Dommett, M.C.
Lieut. G. Lenanton
Lieut. A. Shaw

OTHER OFFICERS

Lieut. F. Chick, D.S.O.
Lieut. H. N. Grundy
Lieut. C. C. W. Havell, M.C.
Lieut. E. C. Tuckey, D.S.O.
2nd-Lieut. H. S. Boddey
2nd-Lieut. C. C. Clarke
2nd-Lieut. R. V. C. Cook
2nd-Lieut. J. J. Harding, M.S.M.
2nd-Lieut. W. R. Mumford
2nd-Lieut. A. M. Parsons
2nd-Lieut. F. G. Smallman

APPENDIX

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 7 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major F. J. Terrell

SECONDS IN COMMAND

Capt. A. B. Scott, M.C.
Capt. A. Tyte

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Lieut. H. W. Buckland
Lieut. F. H. Moss
Lieut. R. L. Stevenson
Lieut. M. F. Symes
Lieut. A. B. Scott, M.C.
Lieut. S. F. Smith
Lieut. J. Thistlewaite
Lieut. A. Tyte

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. A. Hebert
Capt. F. W. T. Hughes (M.O.)
Lieut. T. H. Hancock
Lieut. C. Maynard
Lieut. W. A. Rogers
Lieut. M. R. Ryder
Lieut. W. J. S. Simmons
Lieut. W. S. S. Whiting
Lieut. J. H. A. Wilkins
Lieut. P. S. Wills
2nd-Lieut. E. A. Chapman
2nd-Lieut. P. R. Chivers
2nd-Lieut. W. C. Forse
2nd-Lieut. J. G. Hoare
2nd-Lieut. H. D. King
2nd-Lieut. S. W. I. Mayo
2nd-Lieut. R. C. Rainford
2nd-Lieut. C. C. Todd

7TH SOMERSET BATTN. HOME GUARD

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 8 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major R. H. Elton

SECOND IN COMMAND

Capt. J. MacGregor

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Capt. A. H. Mainstone
Lieut. R. E. B. Harris
Lieut. G. M. Hopson
Lieut. A. V. Mereweather
Lieut. W. D. Mereweather
Lieut. F. Pembury
Lieut. G. C. Popham

OTHER OFFICERS

Capt. M. K. Dunlop (M.O.)
Lieut. N. Elliott
Lieut. E. S. Jenkins
Lieut. E. C. Park
Lieut. L. Smith
Lieut. C. Winfield, M.M.

LIST OF OFFICERS WHO HAVE SERVED IN No. 9 COMPANY

COMPANY COMMANDER

Major D. N. Robertson, M.C.

SECOND IN COMMAND

Capt. G. C. Brooks

PLATOON COMMANDERS

Lieut. T. H. Alger
Lieut. W. S. Goodbody
Lieut. B. Strange
Lieut. W. C. Stuart-Low

OTHER OFFICERS

Lieut. J. F. Boucher
Lieut. J. H. M. Budgett
Lieut. H. S. Crabtree
Lieut. J. G. R. Scarff
Lieut. E. M. Savory
Lieut. J. H. Savory
2nd-Lieut. W. A. Jones, O.B.E.
2nd-Lieut. C. E. Sibley, M.M.

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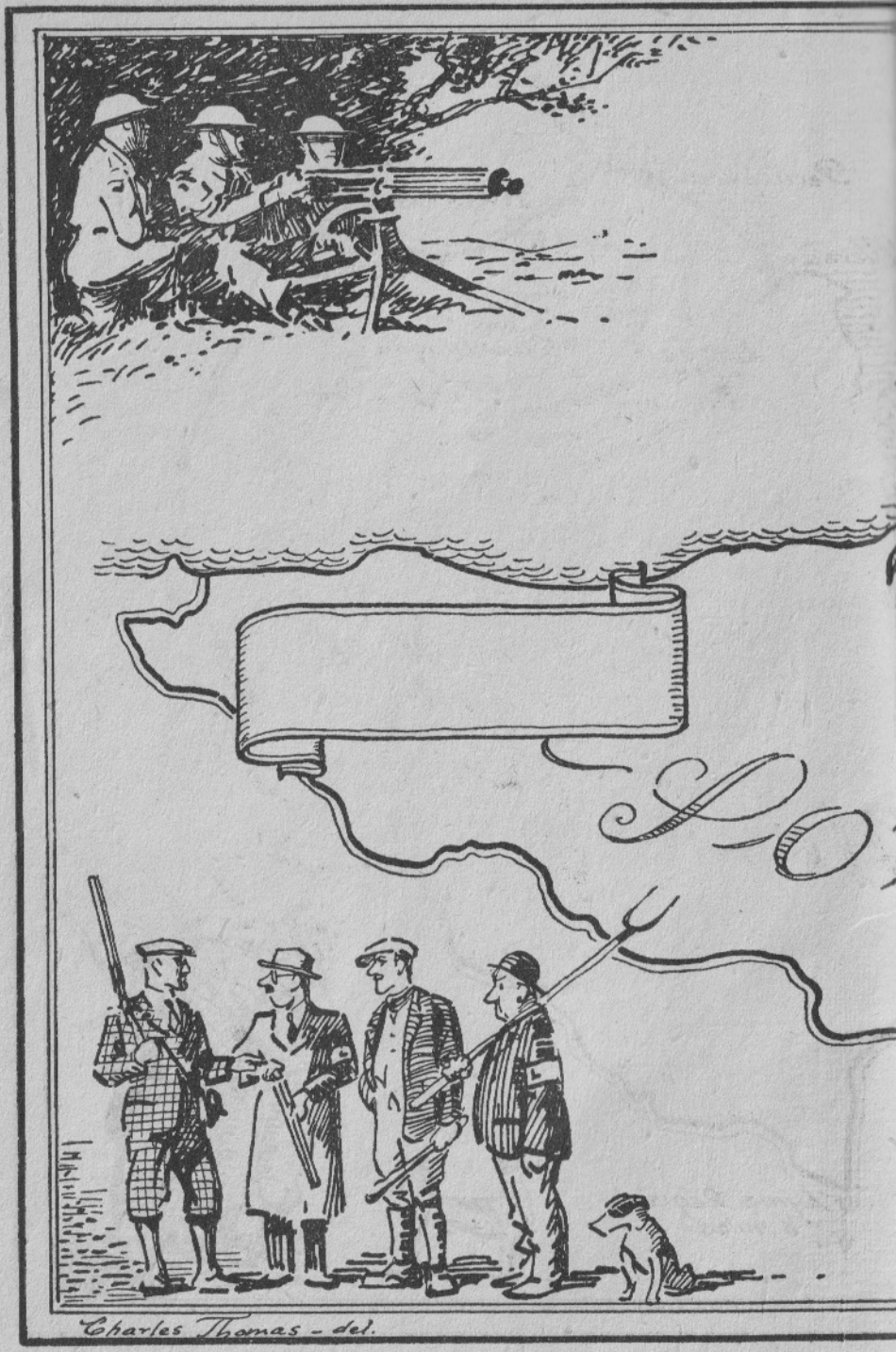
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